JUNE 2014

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THE MAGAZINE OF THE SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

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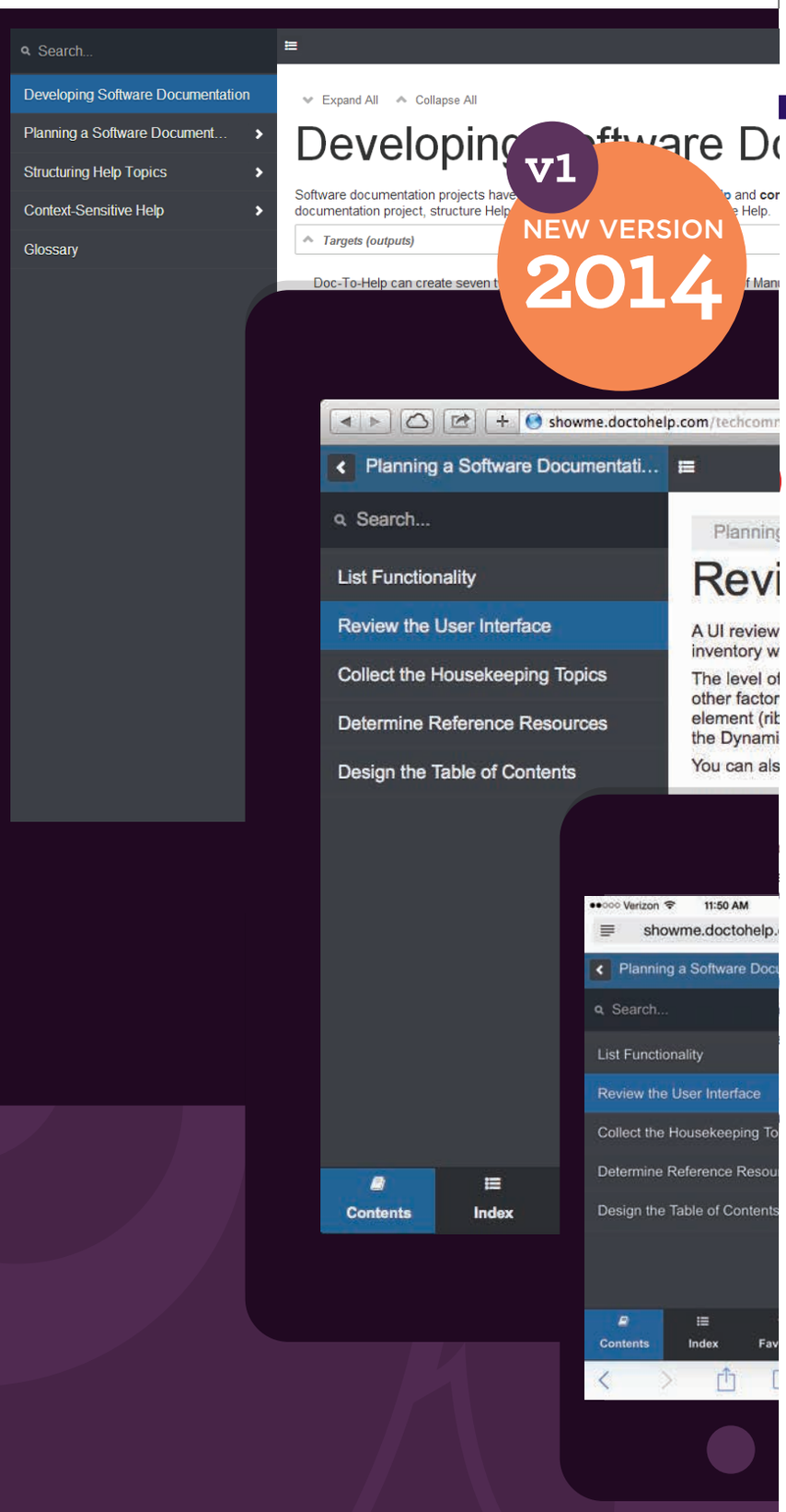

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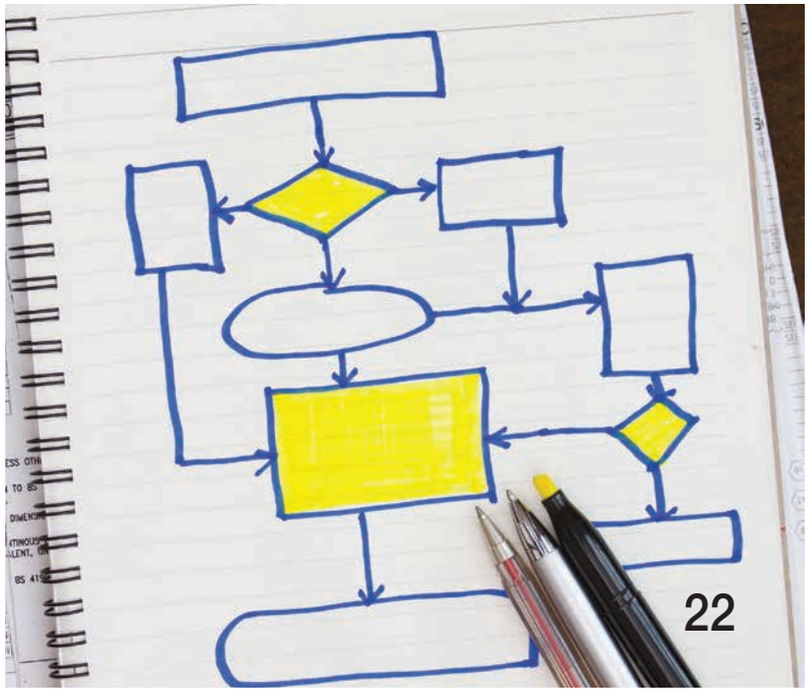

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A Note from the Editor

JUNE *INTERCOM* IS about the art of writing and digital communication. The authors in this issue reuse familiar technical communication writing techniques—storytelling, book production formats, translation processes, and procedure improvements—to produce new results and valuable insights via case studies and personal experience.

Many technical communicators who have been transitioning from the world of analog, print-based technical publications to the world of digital communication may find that technical storytelling, detailed in Steve Lemanski's article, falls nicely within what many of them consider their sweet spot—the craft of writing. In twenty-first-century businesses, storytelling is being used as an effective sales and marketing technique. In fact, Lemanski quotes, storytelling will be the most important, differentiating business skill of the twenty-first century because it is the most direct route to a satisfying user experience—something with which all technical communicators should be concerned. The renewed importance on narrative opens up doors for technical communicators to play a more significant role in the production of digital content.

The second article in this issue, written by Fabrice Lacroix, also recommends a move from print-based paradigms to publishing technical documentation digitally, as components. He claims that technical authors are still using narrative techniques, but that with digital communication, the journey should change for readers from a linear book format to a more practical means of grouping information through component-based writing. Lacroix also says that reusing content—a cornerstone of component-based writing—is a way to tell several stories using the same elements, or to create different paths via topics. Topics allow for a more dynamic reading experience, with countless ways to enhance features and services available to readers: annotations, commenting, bookmarking, and alerting, for example. In short, the need for more dynamic reading experiences should mean an end to print (book) publishing for technical documentation.

Translations continue to be a growing aspect of a technical writer's expertise, and Scott Carothers's article on translation process management provides a case study about a global Fortune 10 company that made their translation process more manageable, efficient, and cost-effective. By combining four elements detailed in the article—a uniform process, a centralized translation memory, vendor neutrality, and business intelligence—the company saved 42% on translation expenses. And related to improving processes, Serena Beck offers effective guidelines for improving internal procedures. Her article suggests ways to rewrite procedures as a living document—one that is frequently reviewed and updated as necessary.

I hope you enjoy this issue of *Intercom*. Feel free to contact me anytime with article ideas, or comments and feedback.

—Liz Pohland
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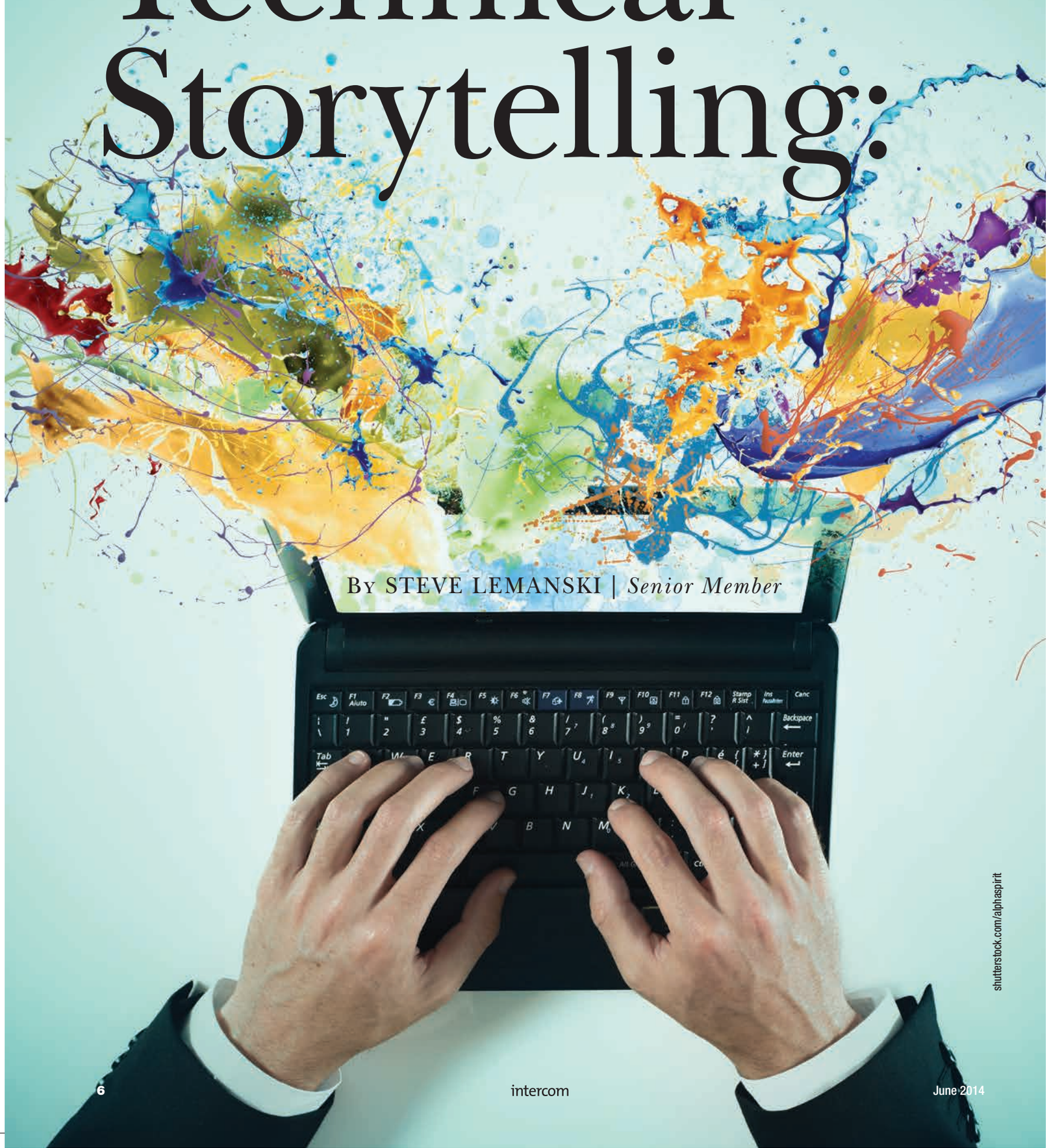

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The Power of Narrative in Digital Communication

THE USE OF *story* or *storytelling* in designing websites and in presenting digital content is gaining widespread acceptance in the various professional communities which contribute to the ever-evolving cyber landscape—graphic artists, Web-based software developers, and user experience (UX) designers. Many technical communicators who have been transitioning in their careers from the world of analog, print-based technical publications to the world of digital communication may find that this new trend toward the narrative falls nicely within what many of them consider their sweet spot—the craft of writing.

Mark Bernstein, scientist, software developer, and a longtime champion of hypertext as a new literary domain for nonlinear storytelling, perhaps best summed up the conviction that many who work in various digital communication spheres now share about the nature of most, if not all, human-computer interaction:

> *We see narrative everywhere. It's a primitive urge, a way to tie cause to effect, to convert the complexity of our experience to a story that makes sense.… The point is not that we should add stories to our sites to ensnare narrative-starved readers. The point is that the reader's journey through our site is a narrative experience. Our job is to make the narrative satisfying.*

And though the narrative orientation appears to have gained a foothold in many stages of website design—user research, requirements development, content strategy, UX design, and prototyping—it's not as though it's a novel idea. The use of the narrative in human interaction and communication has been around since the dawn of mankind. Perhaps one reason technologists and designers are embracing it now as never before is that the state-of-the-art in user-centered digital design and development is breaking free of the notion that cyberspace visitors (users) are nothing more than rather frenzied, purely task-oriented automatons desiring nothing more than to find, buy, or copy what they want … and then get out.

Maybe some of us do resemble that description when we're still shopping and it's only three days before Christmas or we're still awake at 2:00 AM, finishing our term paper due the next day; but maybe many users (under normal circumstances) are actually readers in disguise. And readers like a good story.

David Hailey (Utah State University) makes what is arguably one of the best cases yet for a new paradigm of human-computer interaction on the Web—a *reader-centric* (as opposed to a totally *user-centric*) paradigm. In the first part of his new book *ReaderCentric Writing for Digital Media* (2014), Hailey explains how the original "document" metaphor used for hypermedia (one that would undoubtedly have continued to foster the notion of electronic-interactive media being "textual—documents written with interesting new formats in interesting new ways offering us interesting new possibilities for, and freedoms in, communication") was quickly overtaken by the "construction" metaphor for websites that is so ubiquitous today:

> *Over time, the recognition that interactive media is a text has devolved (except for online help and a few genres on the Internet), and it is not difficult to see why. The original webpages were difficult to create. Only people who bothered to learn "tagging" in SGML and, later, HTML could do it, and the vast majority of these people were programmers [who] do not see hypermedia elements as texts; they have never seen hypermedia elements as texts, and so they established production metaphors compatible with construction and assembly. At an early point in the evolution of digital communication, technical communicators bought into the programmers' structural metaphors. Although writers were among the ones who saw the opportunities of hypermedia very early on, they were not the ones who selected the names of genres or working metaphors.*

Hailey shows in his ground-breaking treatise that when the digital universe is viewed from the perspective of the document metaphor (grounded in the heritage of publishing), it is then possible to more clearly discern the many genres (some of them unique and native to the Web, of course) that are everywhere to be found. Could it be that our use of the term *Web page* is the last remaining vestige of that earlier document metaphor many used in connection with nascent digital media and the coming Internet juggernaut—the metaphor that might have been the more accurate one?

Nevertheless, regardless of the operative metaphors favored by programmers, designers, or writers for their creative output, there is a growing consensus among all of them that their constituents—whether seen as users or readers—are very amenable to the power of narrative.

Narrative—A Basic Human Instinct

Philosophers, archaeologists, anthropologists, researchers of many disciplines, and even marketing communication experts have written widely about the fundamental inclination—in fact, the *need*—of human beings to use stories as a means of making sense of the world around them and their experiences. As recently as 2012, French Palaeolithic researcher and filmmaker Marc Azéma, of University of Toulouse–Le Mirail, and his co-author Florent Rivère caused a stir in several spheres in the arts and sciences by convincingly showing that some of the earliest known Stone Age artworks, such as those found in the 32,000-year-old Chauvet Cave in southern France, were not merely ancient graphic narratives but examples of amazingly sophisticated prehistoric cinema. It now seems plausible that these famous images etched in the walls of caves actually recreated the movement of the wild animals depicted when viewed by the flickering torchlights of those times.

Even now, in twenty-first-century business circles, storytelling as an effective sales and marketing technique is seeing a resurgence of interest. Terri Nopp, founder and CEO of Online Newsroom, a PR agency which helps organizations leverage technology to boost the power of their brands for today's consumers, credits the rise of social media with the newfound interest in storytelling for business. "In the 1990s people in the media were the storytellers, and marketing people focused on providing them with factual bullet points," Nopp says. "Then the Internet came along, followed by social media, and storytelling took off. Companies went from talking about products to talking about what people were doing with them."

In the century just behind us, French literary theorist, philosopher, and linguist Roland Barthes (1966) wrote an influential essay titled "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative," in which he articulated the universality and importance of narrative as well as dissected and analyzed it perhaps more than anyone before or since. This passage of Barthes is very often quoted by proponents of the usefulness and effectiveness of narrative:

> *There are countless forms of narrative in the world. First of all, there is a prodigious variety of genres, each of which branches out into a variety of media, as if all substances could be relied upon to accommodate man's stories. Among the vehicles of narrative are articulated language, whether oral or written, pictures, still or moving, gestures, and an ordered mixture of all those substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fables, tales, short stories, epics, history, tragedy, drame [suspense drama], comedy, pantomime, paintings … stained-glass windows, movies, local news, conversation. Moreover, in this infinite variety of forms, it is present at all times, in all places, in all societies; indeed narrative starts with the very history of mankind; there is not, there has never been anywhere, any people without narrative; all classes, all human groups, have their stories….*

Researchers in the realm of organizational and management theory—really in just the last few decades—have focused a lot of their attention on the role and value of narratives in the workplace. One pair of researchers, Carol Hansen and William Kahnweiler (Georgia State University), in their article about "a research methodology which utilizes storytelling as a vehicle for understanding, explaining, and comparing corporate cultures," conclude that "stories appear to have a vast and untapped potential for understanding, explaining, and enhancing the effectiveness of that elusive entity known as corporate culture."

Charlotte Linde, a senior research scientist at NASA Ames Research Center in California, studied the ways in which institutions use—or should use—narrative to express and transmit social knowledge, even tacit knowledge, over time, for the benefit of all members of the group. (Some examples of tacit knowledge with which you may be very familiar and which Linde herself cites would be the knowledge of how to ride a bicycle, how to knead bread, or how to use a word processor.) She explains that tacit knowledge is the type of knowledge that "is considered particularly problematic for knowledge management, because it is difficult to represent as propositions or rules." Narratives or stories, on the other hand, she shows to be particularly effective for storing and retrieving tacit

knowledge (or completely unstructured data, as we might refer to it today in content management circles).

> *Stories provide a bridge between the tacit and the explicit, allowing tacit social knowledge to be demonstrated and learned, without the need to propositionalize ethics, specify in detail appropriate behavior, or demonstrate why particular heroes of the past are relevant today.*

More recently, Carl Rhodes (University of Leicester) and Andrew Brown (University of Bath), in their exhaustive literature review of this research, conclude that there are "five major areas of inquiry where narrative has been used in organization theory." These areas could also be seen as five *purposes for narrative* that these authors point to, purposes which could be described as follows:

1. **Sensemaking—**narratives are a necessary component in the process of reducing, and thereby understanding, the complexity, ambiguity, and unpredictability of what happens in an organization
2. **Communication—**narratives form the means by which experience is reconstituted, made meaningful, and thereby made communicable
3. **Politics and power—**narratives are the conduits through which authority is legitimized, acquiescence is secured, and the organizational hierarchy is perpetuated
4. **Learning and change—**narratives are vehicles which organizations use to introduce change initiatives, manage planned or unexpected changes, or help institutionalize best practices
5. **Identity and identification—**narratives support the ethos of the organization with which individuals may increasingly identify; and they help establish the sense of community in which individuals may find their own identity

Michael S. Malone is a high-tech journalist of some repute. He is the author of nearly 20 books and has hosted or produced four public television series. As an instructor of professional writing at Santa Clara University, he laments about how his students, mostly senior English majors, seem to be oblivious to the fact that this "networked, fast-moving, and protean culture of the twenty-first century needs people who can take complex subjects and turn them into cogent, compelling, and well-written stories." He's noticed that most of his starry-eyed, liberal arts students have their sights trained on being a great novelist or screenplay writer. He notes that it takes them—the ones who actually succeed at writing professionally—until sometime after graduating before they realize the truth of Malone's conviction: that "storytelling will be the most important, differentiating *business skill* of the twenty-first century." He explains it further, this way:

> *[T]his world doesn't really need a greater flow of new novels. What it does need is storytellers. Millions of them. And it needs them quickly.… I'm increasingly convinced that a great storyteller is even more important to an institution than a great code-writer, an accomplished research scientist, and maybe even a talented CEO.*

"A story must have some points of contact with the reader to make him feel at home in it. Only then can he accept wonders."

—John Steinbeck, novelist, Nobel Laureate

"Stories are not simply nice things to have; they are essential survival tools."

—Hugh MacLeod, advertising copywriter, cartoonist, Web 2.0 consultant

"Story is the vehicle we use to make sense of our lives in a world that often defies logic."

—Jim Trelease, educator, children's literacy activist

"If history were taught in the form of stories, it would never be forgotten."

—Rudyard Kipling, short-story writer, poet, and novelist

"Cognitive psychology has shown that the mind best understands facts when they are woven into a conceptual fabric, such as a narrative."

—Steven Pinker, experimental psychologist, popular science author

Narrative—For More Coherent Print Documents

Many technical writers, after gaining some experience in their particular field or industry, and after getting their proverbial arms around their subject matter, may instinctively (or by reason of their knowledge of expository composition) apply a narrative approach in much of their writing, as technical as it might be. This is good; in fact this is what makes for good technical communication, just as it makes for good fiction, playwriting, or filmmaking.

Nishadi De Silva and Peter Henderson of the University of Southampton have proposed that a generic document narrative (DN) of a typical technical document looks something like this:

> [This is the background to the problem.] | [Here's the problem.] | Here's our solution] | [and the motivation that led us to find this solution.]

A DN, they explain, is a précis of the story that the author intends to convey to the reader. They suggest that a possible, more elaborate DN for a research proposal would take the form of what is shown in Figure 1.

> [We will achieve the required results in the given timeframe.] | [These results are beneficial to you and the scientific community at large] | [because there exists this unsolved problem to which our results are the answer.] | [Studies into previous work in this area show that existing solutions do not address all the complexities of this problem.] | [Our solution is unique and different to previous attempts.] | [To achieve this, we will need total-time] | [and these resources] | [The research will be carried out by researchers in the following institutions] | [because they have an impressive track record of work in this area.]

Source: Nishadi De Silva and Peter Henderson

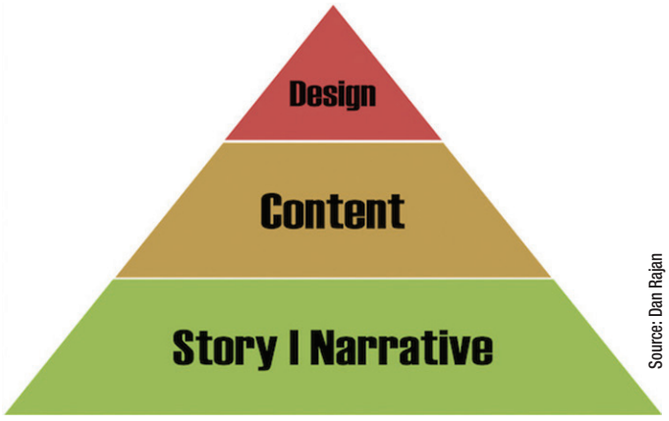
Figure 1. Generic Document Narrative (DN) for a Research Proposal

On the basis of some experiments they conducted in 2006 to evaluate the narrative-based writing of those studied as well as their analysis (using Rhetorical Structure Theory) of the ways in which the writing could be improved, De Silva and Henderson make the case that the coherence—or lack thereof—of technical documents can definitely be attributed to the implicit narrative conveyed by them—or not. They suggest that proponents of the "pyramid principle" of document planning (one which posits that the Introduction section of the document—the top-most section of the pyramid—is supported by the rest of the document's contents—all other sections of the pyramid lying below) would prescribe a structure for the Introduction itself that is narrative in nature.

- **Situation**—the current state of the subject (that you know the reader agrees with)
- **Complication**—complication to this state
- **Question**—the question that the document answers
- **Answer**—the answer to this question

Narrative—Rediscovered for Digital Communication

Interestingly, it is also the pyramid motif that is used by a (unofficial) spokesperson, Dan Rajan, for the new narrative-based school of website and digital media design to relay the importance of story to the totality of user experience. Rajan, who describes himself as a "video editor, creative content designer, and passionate writer from the UK," in a blog article titled "Telling Stories with Your Designs," claims that Web content "can't simply be 'dropped' into the site post-design; it needs to be built up in the correct order: story, content, and then, finally, design." He uses the diagram shown in Figure 2 to stress the fact that the use of narrative is the foundation for effective digital design.



Source: Dan Rajan

Figure 2. The Fundamental Role of Narrative in Web Design

To Rajan, the importance of the narrative paradigm for Web design cannot be overstated: "The narrative of your site is the essence of your story, and encompasses all your content. Your narrative is the video embeds in your site; it is the content on your about page; it is your background image; it's virtually all your content coming together to bring the user an overall experience that forms a narrative."

Mark Bernstein, in his blog article titled "Beyond Usability and Design: The Narrative Web," recommends that the narrative quality of a good website shouldn't be an ephemeral thing, but rather something that buoys the user experience across the entire site: "The promises offered by the landing page and the site structure need to be kept by the entire site—not merely for consistent branding, but as a contract with the audience."

Stories may play significantly into almost every stage of digital media design, as Whitney Quesenbery and Kevin Brooks contend (in what may be the seminal contribution to narrative-based design—their book *Storytelling for User Experience*). They offer many insights as to why and many examples of how "stories serve to ground the work in a real context by connecting design ideas to the people who will use the product." They list four major roles that stories play in user experience design:

- They *explain* research and ideas
- They *engage* the imagination and spark new ideas
- They *create* a shared understanding
- They can *persuade*

So there does seem to exist a consistent and ever-louder rallying cry among digital media design gurus that storytelling is the most direct route to a satisfying user experience. Is it possible that this widely shared feeling about the importance of narrative (among their peers in related professions) is going to open up some new doors for technical communicators to play a more significant role in the production of digital content? That's hard to say with any certainty, but it does sound like it is becoming a more writer-friendly atmosphere to work in!

Stories for User Research and Audience Analysis

UX narratives are designed to address the quintessential questions: "Who are my users/readers?" and "What are my users/readers really like?"

Quesenbery and Brooks explain in depth how stories can be collected in the process of doing various forms of user research. For research scenarios that involve actual face time with users/readers, they share a wonderful (generic) template for a user interview, shown in Figure 3, which models how to use a mix of closed- and open-ended questions with respondents.

A STRUCTURE FOR AN INTERVIEW

Do this...	Like this...
Start with a question that establishes the activity you want to talk about. This question can be simply answered with a yes or no.	"Have you ever [done something]?"
Then ask questions that build up a picture of how this activity fits into their work or life. You can even suggest answers from a standard list for these questions.	"How often do you [do that thing]?" "What makes you decide to [do that thing]?" "Would you say this is something you mostly do at work or at home?"
Now, ask a question to get them to think about a specific example.	"When was the last time you [did that thing]?"
Once they have a specific event in mind, you can repeat the situation, to be sure you have it right, and then ask for the whole story.	"Tell me about that."

Source: Whitney Quesenbery and Kevin Brooks

Figure 3. Interview Template for User Research Story Collection

These co-authors make the distinction between *collecting* stories during initial user research and *developing* stories during more in-depth user analysis (which could be viewed as the direct precursor to requirements development). One particularly profound maxim they offer about UX storytelling is: "Stories are all around us, if you just listen for them. The trick to getting good stories in your user research is to make the time for them."

One of the actionable tips Quesenbery and Brooks give, along this same line, is to look for (hidden) stories in places such as search logs, customer service records, survey data, and the information you can glean from talking to internal staff (or any other people) who interact with your target users.

Stories for Requirements Development

The use of user stories instead of voluminous business and functional requirements for quickly and effectively articulating the most salient must-haves out of any potential set of client requirements has now become popularized (even in the historically late-adopting federal government IT market) by the practitioners of the Agile (especially the variation known as Scrum) product development methodology. These narratives are the ones that answer questions like "What do my users/readers especially want (or need) to do/buy/learn?"

Jeff Gothelf, in his book *Lean UX*, offers some of the best arguments ever articulated for exactly why the Lean Startup and Agile methods contribute to the highest quality software and most satisfying UX designs. He defines the user story very similarly to the way other Agile aficionados before him have done:

> *The smallest unit of work expressed as a benefit to the end user. Typical user stories are written using the following syntax:*
>
> As a ***[user type]***
>
> I want to ***[accomplish something]***
>
> So that ***[some benefit happens]***

Australian Web designers Penny Hagen and Michelle Gilmore have written at length on the value of user stories as a strategic design tool. They propose that "user stories stimulate and facilitate discussion and decision making with clients in the development of a UX strategy." UX design projects, they explain, often come right out of the chutes with a lot of baggage in the form of pre-conceived and vested-interest perspectives on what the new (or re-designed) site is all about, without having focused much on the user perspective. They call this the "inside-out view" of the site. User stories, they maintain, help encapsulate that user perspective you're after, in order to create an "outside-in view"—the only view that really counts (if you want a lot of repeat visitors to your site, anyway).

Stories for Website Design and Content Strategy

Design narratives attempt to resolve design-specific quandaries such as, "How will my design—both at the site level and at the page level—best facilitate meeting the respective goals of both my client and my users/readers? How should I structure my content to best assist ... or to sell … or to instruct (or entertain) my users/readers?"

UX designer, prototyper, and storyteller (as he refers to himself) Braden Kowitz, who leads the Google Ventures Design Studio, elucidates how stories enable better designs. In his blog article titled "Why Good Storytelling Helps You Design Great Products," Kowitz states very directly, "One of the biggest flubs that product teams make is confusing designs that look great with designs that actually work well." Later in the piece, he sheds light on how to avoid such confusion and echoes the sentiments of David Hailey, described above, concerning the "construction" metaphor:

> *I've observed that teams often like to walk through UI designs as they would a blueprint—showing where each element belongs on the plan.... The problem is that when designs are presented this way, you're only building an understanding of how the product looks. You're not focusing on how the product works, and you're not simulating how customers interact with it.... The best product designers practice story-centered design. They begin by crafting stories that show how customers interact with a product, and only after they've accomplished that do they design screens as a way to tell that story of interaction.*

A very useful insight shared by Kowitz is the fact that stories add the element of "time" (or timing) to what can otherwise be static representations or snapshots of user experience during the user interface (UI) design prototyping. Stories are more likely to shine a spotlight on how—and how quickly—a user's interaction with a UI should flow, identifying unnecessary steps and dead ends that often go unnoticed when wireframing or prototyping the product.

Awaken the Storyteller Within

The digital content strategy and website design communities have obviously been awakened to the notion of how important narrative and story are in fulfilling the promise of the longtime user-centered design movement—whether they continue to view their constituents as users or readers. For this reason, if for no other, this may perhaps be one of the best times in recent decades for technical communicators to awaken to their own opportunities—as purveyors of coherent, technically sound stories in cyberspace. Writers, it's time for us to dust off and don our technical storytelling hats while we continue to acquire the necessary technological skills for our user experience toolboxes.

STEVE LEMANSKI (slemanski@citi-us.com), *a technical writer in the IT industry for nearly 20 years, is a member of STC's Washington DC/Baltimore Chapter. He enjoys every bit of the storytelling he does, in the analog and (increasingly) digital communications he produces. He received his BA in communication from University of Colorado, and he is currently pursuing a master of technical communication from Utah State University.*

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The Parts and the Whole:

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By FABRICE LACROIX

Publishing Technical Documentation

TODAY, SEVERAL CENTURIES after the invention of the printing press, we can legitimately ask ourselves whether there's any value to preparing technical documentation in book form. Isn't a printed book—a *whole*—antithetical to the notion of component-based authoring, in which each component is a free-standing *part*? In this article we examine how the book, with its fixed structure, is affecting the way we access and use information. Then we look at some alternative approaches to publishing technical documentation. These reflections stem from our in-house experience and the difficulties we encountered at Antidot upon switching to structured writing.

Antidot is a software vendor that specializes in data management: search engines, text mining, and semantic enrichment. Our mission is to help our clients create value with their content. Five years ago, we embarked on a top-to-bottom redesign of our technological platform. We threw away two million lines of code in order to start with a blank page. This was a golden opportunity to create a new documentation process from scratch.

We decided to go with structured documentation: we hired a technical writer, we selected and purchased an authoring tool, we set up a process, etc. And it works! Everything you've heard about the benefits of component-based writing really is true—it's not just a marketing pitch! We write faster and at a lower cost, we reuse content, and maintenance is easier—just as advertised. It worked so well that very soon we had progressed from a few hundred to a few thousand topics, and from just a handful of guides and manuals to more than a hundred. We were proud of the result. Never before had we written and documented so much, so well.

One day we asked our customers and partners for their feedback about our documentation. In our minds, it was less about asking an open question than about giving them an opportunity to congratulate us and tell us how impressed they were by the quality and quantity of this new material—a perfect counterpart to the richness and beauty of our products. However, the replies were very disappointing. We did not receive praise but complaints: "Too complicated. We can't find anything. We don't know where to look." Our in-house consultants and support staff were saying the same thing. What's more, they told us things were getting worse. The more documentation we were producing, the more they would complain. In addition, the support burden began to increase, as did the problems involved in transferring knowledge.

How could this have happened? At Antidot we are producing software designed to facilitate access to information, with the most advanced companies calling on us to help them make optimal use of their data and transform their businesses. How could we fail with our own documentation? What a shock that was for us! We had to figure out where, when, and how it was so. We conducted a thorough analysis to understand where the problem was.

The content we were producing wasn't the issue, although naturally there's always room for improvement. Nor was it the authoring tool. Nor even the process. In fact, our mistake was rooted in the very last step: publication. We would routinely press a "publication" button and our authoring tool would generate dozens of PDFs, HTML pages, or ePubs. We realized that we were locked into an age-old mindset that goes back to one of humanity's greatest inventions: the printing press. We were *still* printing. Because even in virtual format, generating digital books is printing. And what we were basically offering our users with those books was content—nicely organized content, for sure, but content that imposed a fixed, linear path on the reader.

At this point, it is essential that we differentiate between the book as a structure as opposed to its content, or in other words, the items of information that it conveys. As an end object, a book is a story told by the author, a charted path to be travelled, a set route for taking us from point A to point B. Although that kind of journey is the essence of literature, technical documentation is a different kind of experience, one in which an exhaustive, linear reading makes no sense. In technical documentation, a book is rather a practical means of grouping information. For that matter, the table of contents, the index and bibliography, the search engines provided—they're all there as an excuse, to serve as back doors through which users can escape

the book and its fixed path, to let them access a random piece of contents, to seize the information they need and leave. As for the notion of reusing content, the cornerstone of component-based writing, it is also a means of getting around this rigidity inherent in the book. A means of telling several stories using the same elements—of creating different paths. But then what good is it to publish books? Do we still need to assemble topics into published works? That's a completely different argument, one that has its proponents and its detractors. For my part, I still believe the answer is yes, because a book also provides a context. It reflects the logic behind the product and how it is used. Just as the topic's content is one piece of information, the book's structure offers another one.

At the same time that we are capitalizing on the concept of component-based authoring based on topics assembled into books, we have to change the publication step. In the current approach, topics are just a means of more efficient production; the overall objective is still a book. Therefore users need to search within books, download books, and read books. We need to reverse that paradigm: the user should be searching within topics, reading topics, and navigating from topic to topic, whether linearly by following a predetermined reading path known as a book, or by following links and other ordering methods that can then be constructed dynamically.

For this, we simply need to stop printing! We need to provide a form of search and navigation in which the key that opens the door for users is no longer a book, but a topic. This means that we must keep the topics alive and avoid losing them during the book generation process.

Let's take a closer look at the impact of switching from the book to the topic as the primary editorial unit for publication.

Publishing Books

First, let's examine the dominant practice: the impact of the book as the unit of publishing at the heart of the editorial process (see Figure 1). What we find is a widely recognized paradigm that is deeply rooted in library practices. Writers communicate with users in terms of published work: books arranged on shelves. The essential metadata are those attached to the book, because they serve as access keys: user manual, maintenance guide, for beginners or experts, free or reserved access, for version such-and-such of the product, and so on. But the result in terms of accessibility is dramatic.

When searching for information, two steps are involved. First, you have to know which book you need, and second, once you've identified and downloaded the book, you need to navigate through its contents using the table of contents or the index. Scholarly and cumbersome, isn't it? Moreover, in order to identify the appropriate book for your needs, you either need to use a book classification system built from metadata—a tedious and slightly outmoded method in the digital era—or you need a search engine.

And that's precisely where the limitations of the book-based paradigm are most apparent. The search engine is designed to meet the needs of users who don't know their way around, such as novices who aren't familiar with the documentation available. They type in a few keywords and in response they get a long list of books. That's the first step in a frustrating journey, because in most cases they're not looking for a book—they're looking for information. They're forced to open up each book on the list one by one, download it, browse through it, and determine whether the book actually corresponds to their specific problem and contains the right information. But is it the best information on the subject? Is there any other information available? In order to be sure, they'll need to download, open, and read every book listed in the results page. It's a tedious, frustrating, time-consuming, and absurd process. As for the search engine itself, how much relevance can it offer when it's indexing documents that extend to dozens or hundreds of pages? Given their size and content, some large, generic books will always be part of the results, regardless of the query. The user experience is weak. All of the analytical tools that have been created

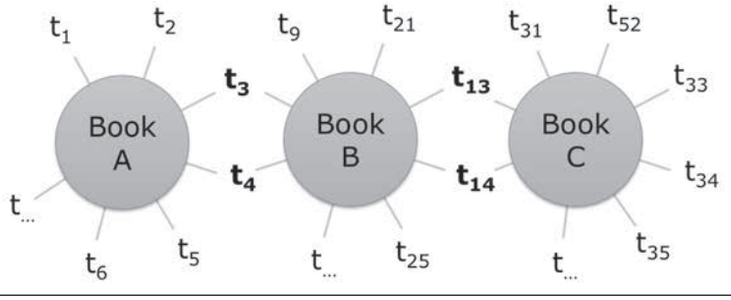
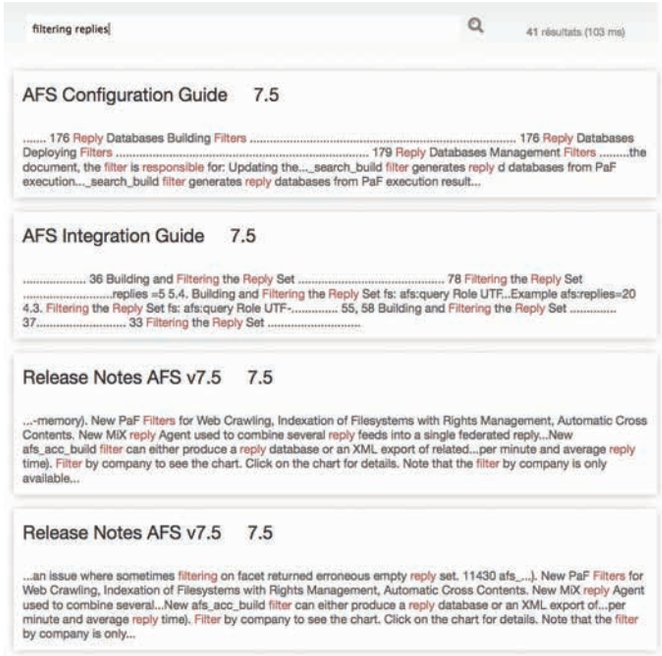
In component-based authoring, topics (t) are shared and assembled in order to create books. With printing, the editorial unit is a book.	
But those books are fixed reading paths imposed on the reader.	**Book A** = $t_1 \rightarrow t_2 \rightarrow \mathbf{t_3} \rightarrow \mathbf{t_4} \rightarrow t_5 \rightarrow t_6 \rightarrow t_{...}$ **Book B** = $t_9 \rightarrow t_{21} \rightarrow t_{25} \rightarrow \mathbf{t_3} \rightarrow \mathbf{t_4} \rightarrow t_{13} \rightarrow t_{14} \rightarrow t_{...}$

Figure 1. Component-based authoring in book format

in order to understand what users read are also biased and therefore useless, because user behavior is itself fundamentally distorted by that forced process of downloading and hunting for information.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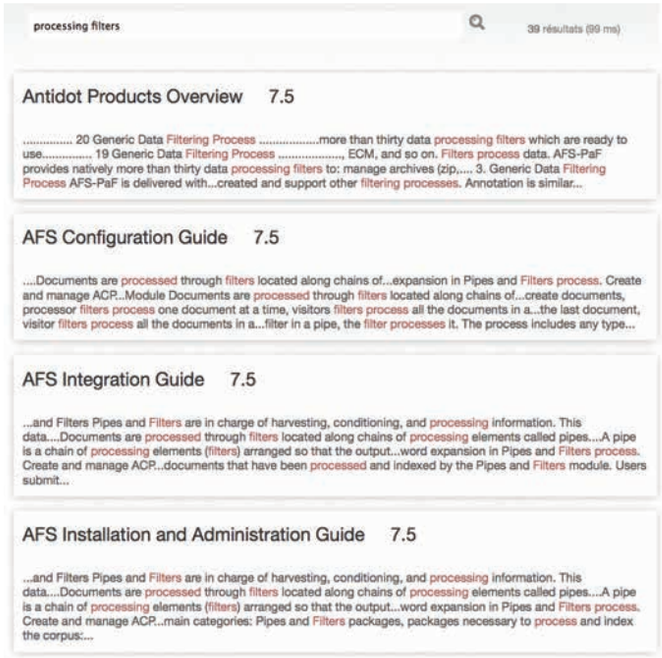
..... 36 Building and Filtering the Reply Set ..... 78 Filtering the Reply Set .....replies =5 5.4. Building and Filtering the Reply Set fs: afs:query Role UTF...Example afs:replies=20 4.3. Filtering the Reply Set fs: afs:query Role UTF-..... 55, 58 Building and Filtering the Reply Set ..... 37..... 33 Filtering the Reply Set .....
Release Notes AFS v7.5 7.5
...-memory). New PaF Filters for Web Crawling, Indexation of Filesystems with Rights Management, Automatic Cross Contents. New MiX reply Agent used to combine several reply feeds into a single federated reply...New afs_acc_build filter can either produce a reply database or an XML export of related...per minute and average reply time). Filter by company to see the chart. Click on the chart for details. Note that the filter by company is only available...
Release Notes AFS v7.5 7.5
...an issue where sometimes filtering on facet returned erroneous empty reply set. 11430 afs_...). New PaF Filters for Web Crawling, Indexation of Filesystems with Rights Management, Automatic Cross Contents. New MiX reply Agent used to combine several...New afs_acc_build filter can either produce a reply database or an XML export of...per minute and average reply time). Filter by company to see the chart. Click on the chart for details. Note that the filter by company is only...

Figure 2. Searching in books. Query: "filtering replies"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AFS Configuration Guide 7.5
....Documents are processed through filters located along chains of...expansion in Pipes and Filters process. Create and manage ACP...Module Documents are processed through filters located along chains of...create documents, processor filters process one document at a time, visitors filters process all the documents in a...the last document, visitor filters process all the documents in a...filter in a pipe, the filter processes it. The process includes any type...
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...and Filters Pipes and Filters are in charge of harvesting, conditioning, and processing information. This data....Documents are processed through filters located along chains of processing elements called pipes....A pipe is a chain of processing elements (filters) arranged so that the output...word expansion in Pipes and Filters process. Create and manage ACP...documents that have been processed and indexed by the Pipes and Filters module. Users submit...
AFS Installation and Administration Guide 7.5
...and Filters Pipes and Filters are in charge of harvesting, conditioning, and processing information. This data....Documents are processed through filters located along chains of processing elements called pipes....A pipe is a chain of processing elements (filters) arranged so that the output...word expansion in Pipes and Filters process. Create and manage ACP...main categories: Pipes and Filters packages, packages necessary to process and index the corpus:...

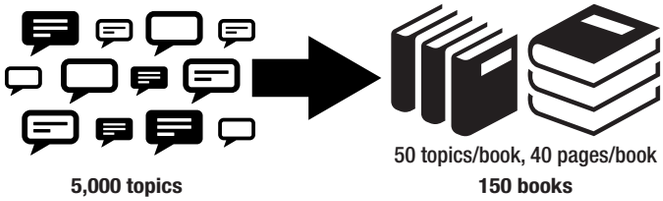
Figure 3. Searching in books. Query: "processing filters"

The searches "filtered replies" (Figure 2) and "processing filters" (Figure 3) return almost the same content and are just like most searches: their results always consist of largely the same list of books, so they don't offer a very useful service.

Publishing Topics

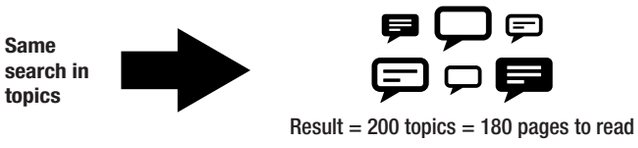
Now let's look at what happens when the topic is the core element of not just the authoring process, but the publishing process as well. What does it mean to "publish a topic"? It means that each topic is exposed as is, in its raw format (in most cases XML). This way, structural information isn't lost or flattened out, as happens during the printing process (i.e., generating PDFs or HTML).

The first consequence is that the search engine is able to index each topic individually, making maximum use of the topic's structure and metadata. Thus, when the user submits a query, the search engine responds with topics, and since only relevant topics are shown, the results are vastly more useful. Let's consider the example of a corpus of 5,000 topics that make up 150 books, with an average size of 50 topics and 40 pages per book.



In a book-level search (the usual practice), the search engine will easily return more than 50 books. Fifty books x 40 pages = 2,000 pages to browse through.

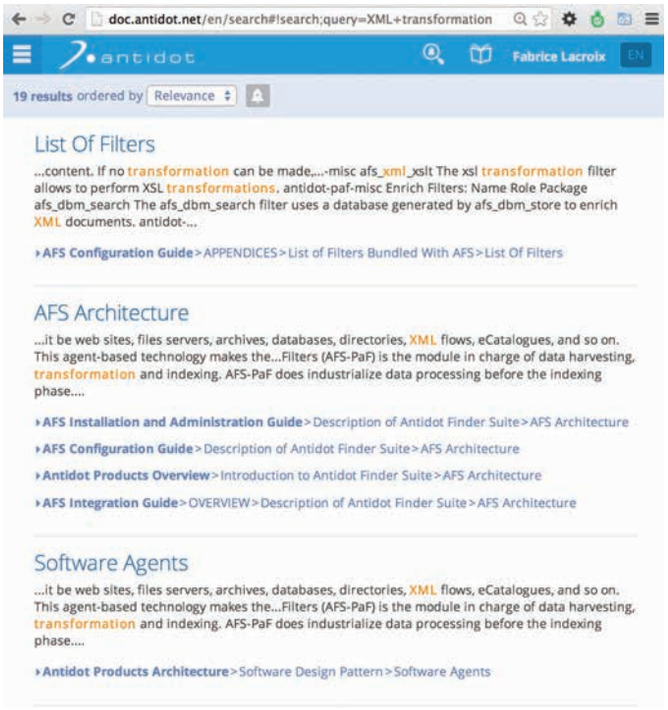
Whereas when topics are indexed, the search engine will yield, at most, 200 topics—the equivalent of 200 pages of content. That's 10 times more efficient.



And that's not including the user's enhanced ability to apply filters (faceted searches) by making combined use of the topic's metadata and the metadata of the books in which those topics appear.

With topic-based publication, the search engine generates topics in response to a query. This is both more precise and more informative. When a topic appears in several books, the user can choose the context in which to consult that topic.

The second major consequence of topic-based writing is that the reading phase is made considerably simpler, because each topic is accessed and read directly. Users can choose the specific context (i.e., the specific reading path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AFS Configuration Guide > APPENDICES > List of Filters Bundled With AFS > List Of Filters
AFS Architecture
...it be web sites, files servers, archives, databases, directories, XML flows, eCatalogues, and so on. This agent-based technology makes the...Filters (AFS-PaF) is the module in charge of data harvesting, transformation and indexing. AFS-PaF does industrialize data processing before the indexing phase....
AFS Installation and Administration Guide > Description of Antidot Finder Suite > AFS Architecture
AFS Configuration Guide > Description of Antidot Finder Suite > AFS Architecture
Antidot Products Overview > Introduction to Antidot Finder Suite > AFS Architecture
AFS Integration Guide > OVERVIEW > Description of Antidot Finder Suite > AFS Architecture
Software Agents
...it be web sites, files servers, archives, databases, directories, XML flows, eCatalogues, and so on. This agent-based technology makes the...Filters (AFS-PaF) is the module in charge of data harvesting, transformation and indexing. AFS-PaF does industrialize data processing before the indexing phase....
Antidot Products Architecture > Software Design Pattern > Software Agents

Figure 4. With topic-based publication, searches return fine-grained results at the topic level.

or book) in which they want to read about the topic. They can even maintain their focus on the topic while changing the reading context; in other words, they can read about the topic within one book, and then within another book. It then becomes possible to propose follow-up texts for the user to read or other topics related to the current topic. This can be done dynamically, taking into account both the initial query and the content that users have already consulted: "You're looking for information on this subject, you've already read this and this, we suggest you glance

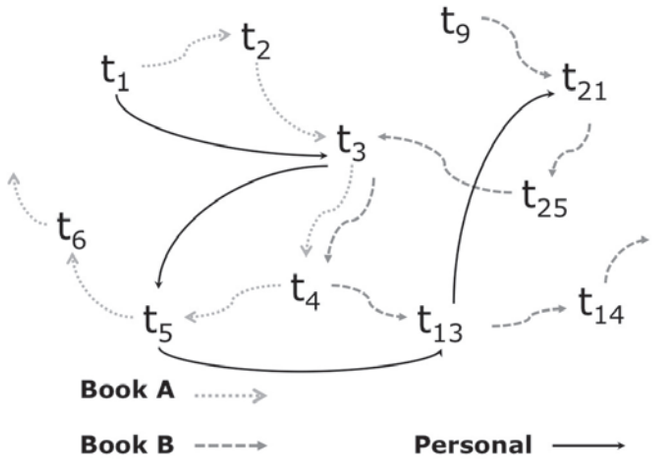


Figure 5. Books are nothing but proposed reading paths. Other paths can be constructed and suggested dynamically.

[T]he use of topics as the basic building block in publishing yields countless ways to enhance features and services available to readers: they can annotate and comment on each topic, create alerts, attach bookmarks, and more.

at this and that as well." Access and navigation are significantly enhanced and the user experience is transformed.

There are other consequences to topic-based publishing as well:

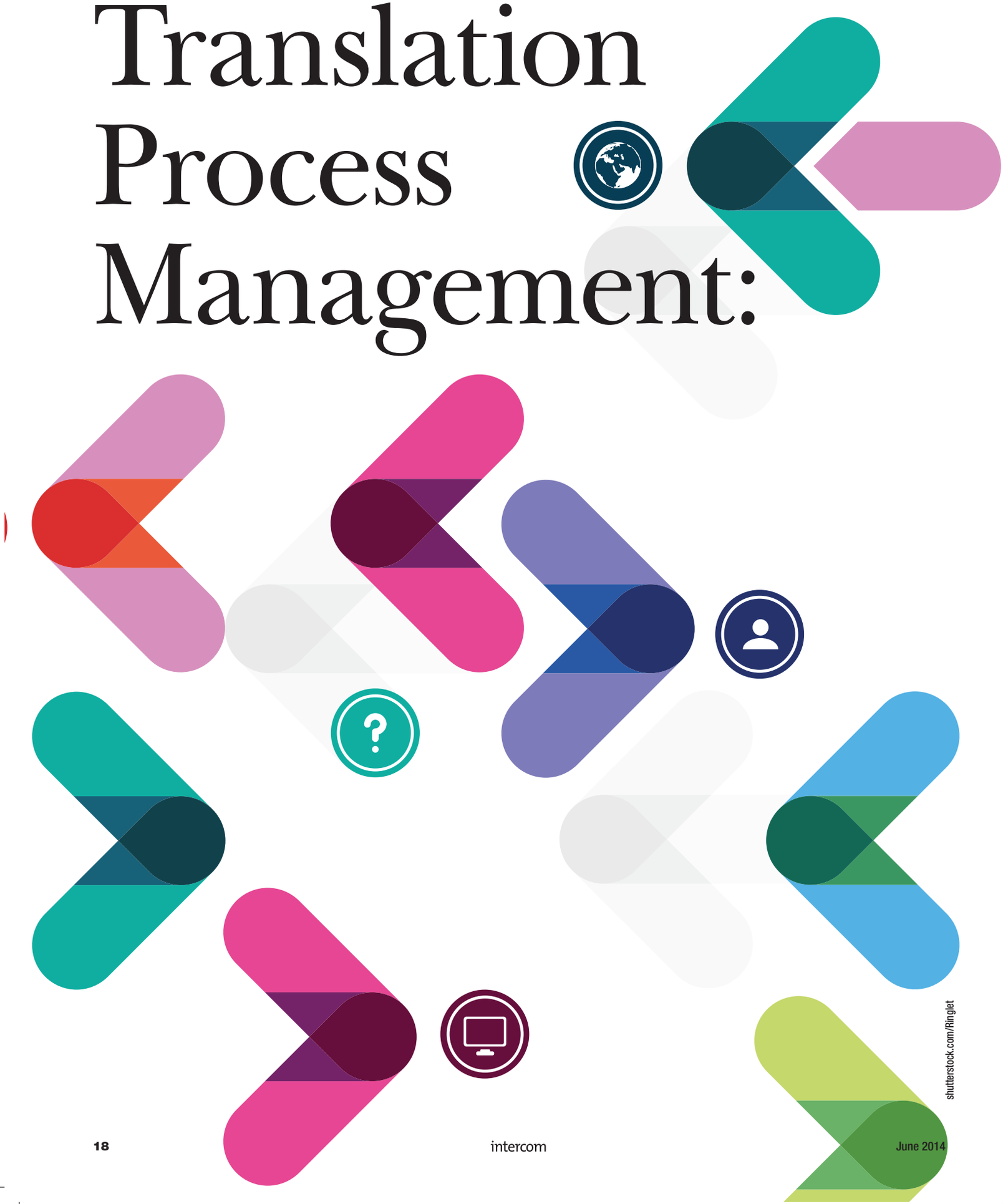
- Any analysis of viewed content and user behavior is infinitely more precise, because access to each topic is identified and traced individually, as are the searches that led users to that topic and the reading path(s) by which the topic was consulted.
- A topic-based approach can be combined with advanced text mining and semantic analysis technology to extract knowledge, to create links and reading paths automatically, and to link topics to third-party content such as knowledge bases or user forums.
- Lastly, the use of topics as the basic building block in publishing yields countless ways to enhance features and services available to readers: they can annotate and comment on each topic, create alerts, attach bookmarks, and more.

Needless to say, all of this is complex and requires an entirely new type of publishing tool, one that can handle a comprehensive range of issues related to security, access filtering, customization, and support for content variants (conditional text, audience-based content, ditaval file management, etc.). This technology already exists and is ushering in a new era for making maximum use of technical documentation, with a significant and measurable impact on support costs and customer satisfaction.

It truly is possible to shift the paradigm and enter a new century, in order to better serve our users and, by extension, our businesses. We just need to stop printing.

FABRICE LACROIX *is the founder and CEO of Antidot and Fluid Topics. His career is intimately linked to the development of the Internet and of the Web. He began as a system developer in the telecom industry, and in 1994 he took part in the creation of the first French ISP as CTO, developing many breakthrough technologies. Convinced that the future is in the data more than in the infrastructure, keen on innovation and entrepreneurship, Fabrice created Antidot in 1999. Fabrice is also a board member of different companies, investors, and organizations where he shares his views on innovation and the evolution of the software industry. Fabrice graduated from ENSIMAG and holds a master in computing from the Imperial College London.*

Translation Process Management:



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How One Fortune 10 Enterprise Took Control

By SCOTT CAROTHERS | *Member*

TECHNICAL WRITING PROFESSIONALS are amongst the most knowledgeable members of an enterprise, navigating through tasks that are typically scattered across numerous business units, silos, and departments. Often referred to as a "jack-of-all-trades," being a technical writing professional means knowing every aspect of content delivery and process building. The job is a constant battle of simplifying the message, learning shortcuts, and maximizing content reuse. In today's fast-paced world, deadlines never expand, they only truncate between the enterprise and the customer. For global enterprises, translations continue to be a growing aspect of a technical writer's expertise. However, few have been truly educated in the complex process of translations, and few enterprises have a well-monitored, transparent process with real-time business intelligence available.

The following is a brief case study detailing how one Fortune 10 enterprise came to grips with their translation needs and made their process more manageable, efficient, and cost-effective. There are several important takeaways below that can make a major difference in your operations.

How Global Corporations Approach the Translation Process

One technical communications manager within the Fortune 10 company shared the following: "The translation process is like a black hole, I work really hard to get the content right, and then it goes to a translator and disappears for weeks. There is no transparency into the process, and no business intelligence to tell us if we are on schedule, on budget, or if quality is improving or deteriorating."

Similar comments were made by an indirect sourcing manager regarding the enterprise as a whole, but with more specificity. He said, "I have four main concerns with my company's translation process. First off, there is no uniform, enterprise-wide process that simplifies the management of this process for all of my users across business units, silos and departments. Secondly, our TM [translation memory] is scattered across several vendors, which is unacceptable. This should be centralized and maintained in-house to ensure proper use of 100% word matches, fuzzy matches, etc., before the projects are sent to a vendor. Also, we need to remain vendor-independent, instead of locked into the two or three vendors who work with each business unit. We need to choose the best vendor for each job. Lastly, we need independent business intelligence on every step of the process, with real metrics to ensure that we are continually improving the process."

These comments are an unveiled look at the way many global corporations are beginning to approach

the management of the arduous translation process. Achieving these results isn't as hard as it sounds, because they are all interrelated.

Combining the first three elements cited by the sourcing manager above—1) a uniform, enterprise-wide process, 2) a centralized and maintained translation memory (which is their intellectual property), and 3) being vendor independent—actually facilitated and enabled the business intelligence. Let's dig deeper in to how this trifecta fell into place!

1. A Uniform Process

Providing the enterprise with one simple-to-use translation process meant eventually getting everyone at the Fortune 10 on board. They thought they had identified and converted about 80% of the translation buyers within the enterprise at that point. These buyers were found in human resources, legal, regulatory, e-commerce, Web, training, marketing, polices, consumer communications, consumer help desks, software, information technology, and technical writing.

Getting nearly everyone on board with reinventing this process was certainly the toughest piece of the puzzle. There were plenty of naysayers with the same argument: "Our preferred vendors have a process that works, why would we change it now?" The sourcing manager's response was simple, "This is not working. There is no oversight, no validation of quality or cost. A Spanish document could end up in the Middle East!"

Once those obstacles were cleared, the improvements began. They now started to see real-time business intelligence for the first time, and that meant that they would eventually be able to negotiate lower translation rates with this information. While it is not commonly understood, translations have reached commodity status; there are 28,000 language service providers (LSPs), and quantity drives pricing. So the more they could aggregate the entire volume from the vendors, the more the costs decreased. This would be impossible to accomplish without a uniform, enterprise-wide process because translations are an indirect cost, often sporadic and always added to more expensive and tracked items, like website expenses, product documentation expenses, etc.

Translation Case Study

Let's look at an example project, a 15,000 word technical document. The typical translator will translate approximately 1,500 words per day, so just the translation portion of the project will take 15,000/1,500 = 10 days. Using the centralized TM typically produces a 50% match rate, changing the formula to 7,500 new words/1,500 words per day = 5 days for the new content, plus 7,500 matched words/ 5,000 reviewed words per day, or 1.5 days. Now the turnaround time from the translator should be 6.5 days, meaning that delivery will occur 3.5 days sooner and with greater consistency! Financially, if they were paying $.20 per word, they should only be paying for 7,500 new words * $.20 or $1,500, plus 7,500 matched words at the review rate, which is typically 50% less, say $.10 per word, or $750. That totals $2,250 instead of the full rate of $3,000, a 25% financial savings, on top of 35% time savings.

2. Centralized Translation Memory

Centralizing their TM became relatively easy with one uniform process. For those who haven't yet crossed this bridge: translation memory is source language phrases, paired with the corresponding target language phrases. It's all of your previously approved translation content, which can be reused in each new document with the same verbiage. As new content is submitted into the process, the system parses the content into phrases, then searches the TM for the same or similar phrase and automatically inserts it into the new translated document, color-coded by degree of the overall match. This reduces the work required by a human translator, lowering the overall cost and speeding up project completion, all while increasing the consistency of the translations.

3. Vendor Neutrality

By centralizing their TM and combining it with their new uniform process, translation quality and process efficiency began to skyrocket. First, everyone was working with the same translation memory, so they started to see greater consistency on their translations projects. Working with multiple vendors, each translator uploaded their finished project (including the source and target language pairs) so that every new project would leverage all previously approved translations. This was in stark contrast to simply farming assignments out to various vendors, each using a small percentage of the company's intellectual property that they had accumulated from their previous assignments. Different translators may translate the same phrase differently, so the website translation starts to differ from the product sheet, etc. This inconsistency not only causes problems for your customers around the globe, but it also can be quite costly. Glossaries, term-bases, and style sheets were established across the Fortune 10 enterprise for staff and vendors. Subject matter experts and in-country reviewers who make the final translation edits from the vendor's submission uploaded to the TM and shared the changes with the vendors. Utilizing the centralized translation memory eliminated inconsistencies and additional expenses. More importantly, it became evident that efficiency was increasing.

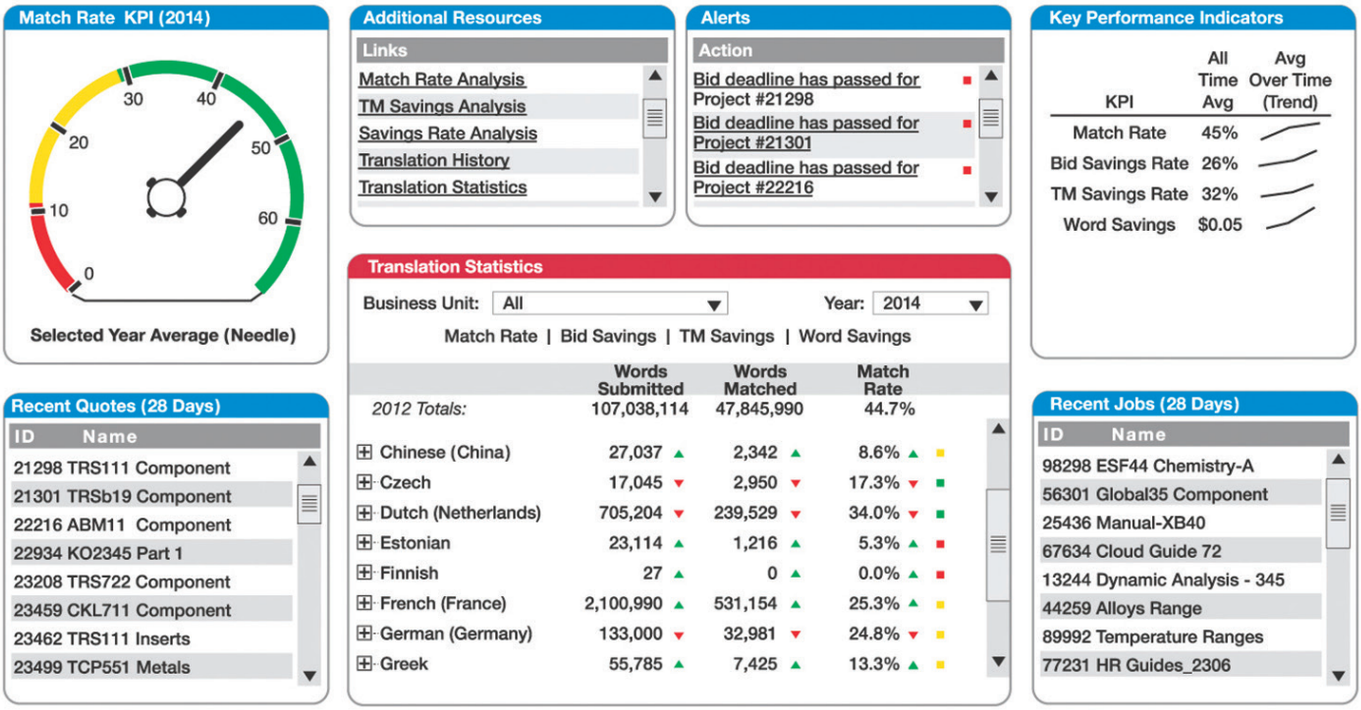


Figure 1. The Globalizor™ Dashboard (above) displays the most pertinent business intelligence, such as match rate, recent jobs and quotes, and key performance indicators. All contain links providing further details.

4. Business Intelligence

With the first three elements in place and well adopted within the company, attention focused on the business intelligence for the process. The first step was to establish vendor performance ratings, which is standard for most vendors but completely absent for translation vendors. To make the best buying decision, three key elements had to be tracked: quality, delivery performance, and cost-competitiveness. And these elements had to be tracked all the way down to each language pair. Vendors are often better at certain languages than others and having that knowledge and leveraging it every day reduces performance issues. Quality could now be measured in defects per 1,000 words and captured in the review process. Delivery performance was automatically captured when the finished files and language pairs were uploaded to the system (they had to include the language pair uploads because LSPs are reluctant to send these to the customer for fear of losing control, but they all want the best ratings in order to earn more business so it has become automatic). Lastly, cost-competitiveness could now be calculated by the system in timed intervals based on each vendor's calculated price, compared to all other approved vendors for each project.

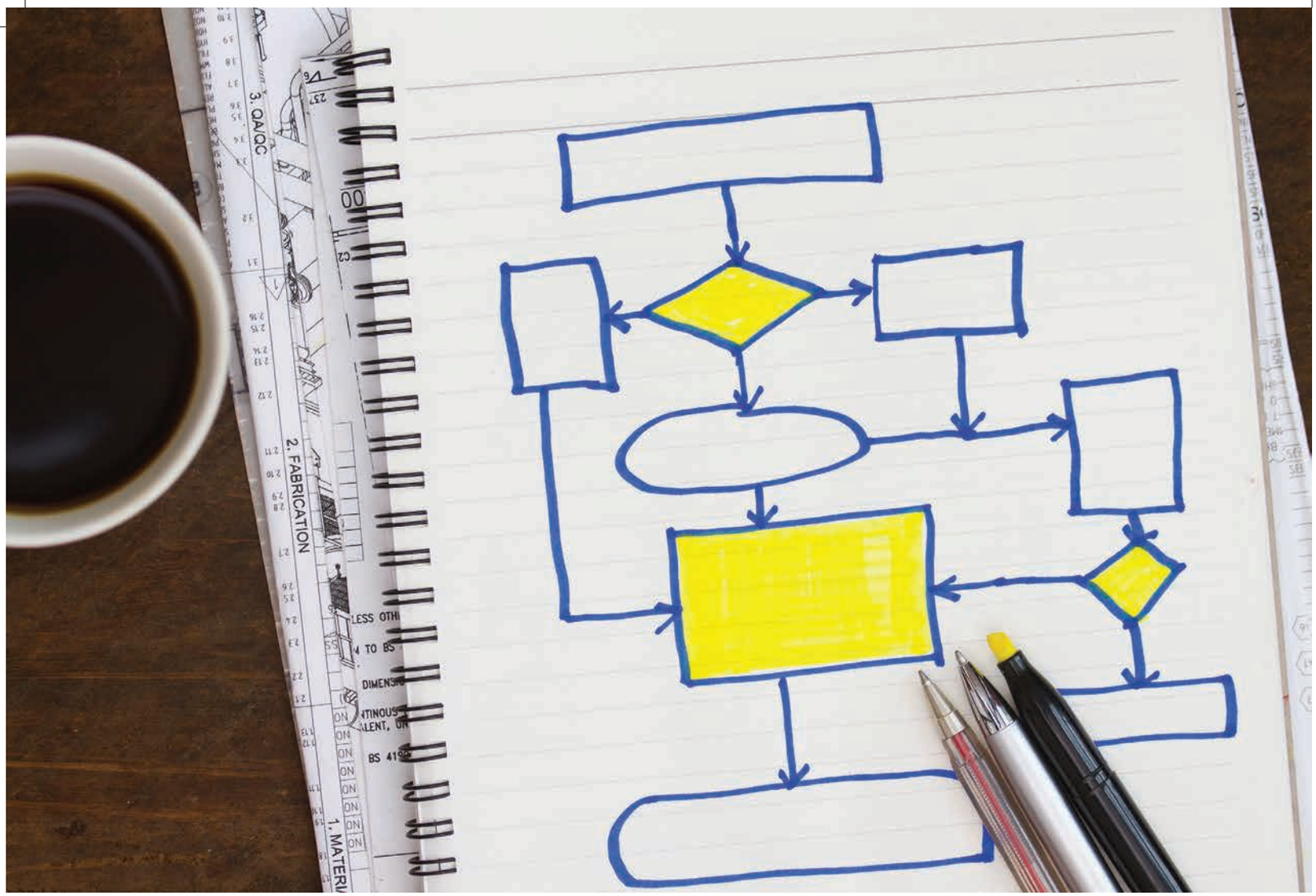
Having these vendor performance ratings gave the client the upper hand in the relationship, changing the status quo in the vendor-enterprise relationship. While price is always a consideration, it is usually secondary to quality. With the vendor performance ratings, they could now reasonably choose the best vendor for the project, greatly lowering the possibility of complications and delays within the project.

In addition to the vendor performance ratings, they could use metrics to show management the overall increase in volume with the current staff, the specific volume by each language, the decreasing net word costs, and the translation memory growth—all tracked by language pair and comparable over time.

With substantive data, it is much easier to plan, forecast expenses, and even calculate the cost of adding new languages to the website, for instance. It is commonly understood that most technical writing teams typically see this type of metric relative to their daily work via content management systems; what has been described above simply extends the same metrics when applied to the translation process.

It is important to note that this Fortune 10 company spent $12 million annually on translations. In the first six months of implementing the process, they projected to save 42% with the steps described above. This presents one enterprise's navigation to their optimized translation process. While changing the status quo is always difficult, understanding the big picture will offer insights for everchanging technologies that are now available, even for an enhanced translation process that expands the deadlines instead of truncating them.

SCOTT CAROTHERS *(Scott@theTechnologyAgency.com) is a senior globalization executive at Kinetic theTechnologyAgency. Kinetic provides Globalizor™ software, an enterprise-level, vendor-independent translation process management tool. Kinetic theTechnologyAgency is based in Louisville, KY.*



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Improving Existing Internal Procedures

By SERENA BECK | *Senior Member*

THIS ARTICLE OFFERS you effective guidelines for improving your company's internal procedures. The first procedure that I wrote for my company was during my interview. I was given a *Star Trek* calendar and told to write instructions for operating one of the ships. I am not a Trekkie and don't know anything about *Star Trek*. However, I used creative license and wrote a procedure that included the basic elements. I am still working at the same company and write internal procedures and user guides for our clients.

Due to my lack of research and understanding, my procedure for operating the ship was not accurate. If I had been able to talk to the ship's engineer, users, or Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) who knew how to operate it, I would have had a better understanding of the ship. In order to edit or rewrite a procedure, you must first understand the process. Sometimes understanding the process can take a long time and may require several meetings with team members and procedure rewrites.

Plan and Organize

Establish or revise your documentation review and testing process before you edit any of your procedures. Once these procedures are finalized, review your existing procedures and create a schedule outlining the amount of work and time required to update your existing procedures. This will ensure you are set up for success before your project begins.

As you start to review your procedures, ensure they are consistent. Use templates to define the structure for each type of procedure. For example, all standard operating procedures (SOPs) may include a high-level summary flowchart. Flowcharts and other diagrams can help users see the big process picture.

Create an editing checklist or style guide to ensure that the procedures follow the same conventions no matter which team member is writing the procedure. If you are reviewing a large number of procedures at the same time, group them into related departments and review the grouped documents together.

SME Extraction

Talk to SMEs and users to better understand their processes. Ensure their procedures are still relevant and reflect how they do their jobs today. After I asked our SMEs how they completed tasks, I discovered that some of our procedures no longer reflected what we actually did. If procedures don't accurately reflect a process, you risk receiving an audit finding. Once a discrepancy has been found in a procedure, it must be updated as soon as possible. An even bigger risk of an inaccurately documented procedure is if a team member doesn't agree with or understand the process. She may create an "undocumented" procedure that only she follows. This could result in team members completing the same task in a slightly different ways.

Here are some sample SME procedure improvement questions:

- Do you still follow these steps?
- Is the information in the correct order?
- Could this be done in a more efficient way?
- Is the right amount of detail included?
- Could a new member of your team follow this procedure?
- Are there any prerequisites to this procedure? For example, knowing how to use a tool before following the procedure.
- Are the references accurate?

Compliance and References

Some companies may be audited by their clients or government agencies like the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). For example, a medical device company may be regulated by the FDA. Many procedures need to be in compliance with regulations and standards such as the Code of Federal Regulations 21, Part 820 Quality System Regulation or International Standard Organization (ISO) such as ISO 9000 or 13478.

While you are reviewing your procedures, ensure they are in compliance with applicable regulations and standards. Ensure that all internal and external references to other documents are accurate. Create and check a master cross reference list that lists all the documents and the references and keep it up to date.

The Minimalist Approach

New employees need a certain level of detail to complete tasks. However, too much detail can cause wordiness and confusion. You don't want to document what users already know or what is obvious. You want to document difficult tasks or what the user doesn't know. For example, if a user knows how to check a document in, don't document the detailed check-in steps. Ask yourself if the information in the procedure adds value. If not, remove it.

Review your internal procedures for information that may often change. For example, don't include version numbers in document titles. Rather than naming your document "Upload Process 1.7b," name it "Upload Process." Instead of including a hyperlink, include the website name.

Review and Training

When the procedures are reviewed, ensure that there is enough time for informal and formal reviews. Sometimes too many reviewers can pull your documents in many different directions. One writer or manager should be the decision maker and should have the final say on edits.

Once formal reviews are complete, make the documents effective but allow enough time for training on the procedures. Ensure that employees receive the appropriate level of training especially if the changes that were made are significant.

Audits

Once the procedures have been approved or finalized, don't forget about them. Conduct quarterly reviews to ensure that they are still serving their purpose. If you know an audit is approaching, review, test, and implement your procedures well in advance. Keep a checklist of minor and major changes to make to the next release of the procedures. Once a year, conduct an internal audit to test your company's procedures. Ask someone from another department or someone who is not familiar with the processes to test them.

Procedures are living documents. This may mean that some procedures live in a constant state of flux. However, once a procedure has had each piece of the process puzzle organized into logical steps, has been edited, tested, and finalized, it can rest (at least until the next review). Since our company started reviewing our processes on an annual basis and improved our procedure training, we've had fewer procedure related audit findings each year.

SERENA BECK (Serenabeck.com) *has been a technical writer for 10 years at Haemonetics Corporation, a blood management solutions company. In 2012, she received her CPTC. She lives in Victoria, BC, Canada, with her husband and two children. She enjoys traveling with her family and writing magazine articles.*

STC President Kit Brown-Hoekstra's Inaugural Address

BY KATHERINE (KIT) BROWN-HOEKSTRA |
STC President

Editor's Note: Kit Brown-Hoekstra was formally installed as STC President at the Annual Business Meeting during the Summit on Monday, 19 May. Below is an early draft of her planned remarks, provided to Intercom *to share with the entire Society.*

I AM HONORED and humbled by the outpouring of support that I have received from all of you. Thank you! I would also like to thank the Board, the staff, and all of our volunteers throughout the Society who help support our activities and keep us a vibrant and supportive organization. It is truly a privilege to serve you this year as President and to give back to the organization that has given me so much in my career. I look forward to working with all of you.

This past year—our 60th anniversary—was a year of reflecting on how far we have come and of planning for the future. With the hiring of Chris Lyons as our CEO, we have seen a year of renewal—of our mission, of our membership, and of our view of ourselves. I've sensed, too, a renewal of energy, positivity, connection, and growth amongst the members, volunteers, and staff.

This year, we will use this momentum as a catalyst for acting on our strategic plan and making changes that support our members in their professional development and that position STC to thrive in a world where the speed of change is accelerating rapidly.

As the speed of change increases, our skills—the ability to transform data into usable content, to explain, to organize, to structure, to teach, to adapt—become even more vital. These skills are foundational to the success of every product, process, and service on this planet (and, if you count the Space Station, off of it). Our innate curiosity and ability to ask beautiful (and sometimes impertinent) questions allow us to be change agents who bring order to an increasingly chaotic world of data and information overload.

As STC members, we have the advantage of a community of colleagues who support, mentor, and guide us in our quest for knowledge. This collegial environment has always been one of our greatest assets, albeit it one that is difficult to market because of its intangibility.

And, because we want to build on this strength, we are making changes to the infrastructure to better support our activities. We are aligning our educational offerings to provide more continuity across media and to identify clearer paths for members to grow professionally. We are building partnerships with sister organizations to strengthen connections and learning opportunities with related fields. We are actively seeking ways to support our student and young professional members as they grow into their careers by providing networking and mentoring opportunities, continuing education, and job search advice.

As we contemplate each change, we ask ourselves, "What is in the highest and best interest of the Society, its members, and technical communication as a discipline?" Sometimes, the choices are difficult ones and the process of implementing change can get messy, but ultimately, we are a better, stronger organization for having gone through these efforts.

On behalf of the Board and the staff, I want to thank you, our members (especially our volunteers), for your continued dedication and support. This is going to be a great year!

Society-Level Offices for 2015

BY AIESSA MOYNA | *Chair, Nominating Committee*

ARE YOU INTERESTED in becoming a candidate for elected office in 2015? Can you suggest, or do you know someone who would make a great contribution to the Society by being elected? Are you interested in learning more about a particular office? If so, the Nominating Committee would like to hear from you.

And more people can run now! At their May 2014 meeting, the STC Board of Directors voted to adjust the qualification criteria for candidates for the Board and the Nominating Committee. With the vote, they dropped the requirement that candidates be Senior Members of the Society, which previously meant that candidates had to have five consecutive years of membership. Now, any member with at least one full year of membership is eligible to run.

This year, the Nominating Committee seeks candidates for the following positions:

- Vice President
- Treasurer
- Director (two positions)
- Nominating Committee Member (two positions)

The STC Board includes leaders with both business and academic backgrounds. All candidates should be experienced working at a strategic level, comfortable making decisions collaboratively and focused on outcomes. Previous Society-level leadership experience is not as important as having gained professional skills in managing people, projects, and budgets. Serving on the STC Board is a chance to leverage these skills to lead a tax-exempt/nonprofit organization and to help ensure the Society continues providing members with an increasing quality of opportunities and services.

The Nominating Committee is responsible for selecting qualified candidates for Society office. All candidates must have extensive contacts across the Society. Serving on the Nominating Committee provides an opportunity to help shape the future of the Society by identifying leaders to run for elected office.

If you can rise to this challenge, fill out the online nomination form at *http://summit.stc.org/stc-officer-candidate-recommendation-form/*. A link to the form has also been posted at *www.stc.org/election*. You can also contact *stc@stc.org* or call +1 (703) 522-4114 and request that a candidate nomination form be mailed to you.

Use the same form if you want to recommend someone else for office. Submit one form for each person you want to recommend. The deadline for receipt of all forms is 31 July 2014.

Members who complete the nomination form (or who are recommended by others) do not automatically become candidates. Once the forms are received, the Nominating Committee contacts all prospects to confirm their interest. Once confirmed, interested prospects are asked to forward additional information, which the committee uses to determine candidacy.

A healthy Society leadership requires the talents of seasoned leaders with fresh perspectives. All interested members are therefore encouraged to complete and submit the nomination form by 31 July 2014.

Couldn't Attend the Summit? Now You Can!

THE 2014 TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION SUMMIT may have just ended, but you can still attend all the sessions—without traveling across the country or across the globe. The content of most of the 80 sessions was captured (audio and visuals) and will be available shortly on the STC website (*www.stc.org*) through Summit@aClick.

Summit@aClick is a collection of session recordings that lets you "attend" the Summit from your home, office, or anywhere else. No matter the reason you didn't go, now the Summit can come to you. And those who *did* go to Phoenix will be able to view the sessions they missed or revisit the ones they attended to refresh their memory of the points made by the speakers. **STC's Summit is the only meeting in the technical communication field that offers this added bonus.**

Summit@aClick is included in the full registration fee for attendees, who will receive a password to access the content when it's available (email *stc@stc.org* if you do not). Anyone who did not attend the Summit may purchase access for **$249 for members and $499 for nonmembers**. That low price gives you access to every session we recorded, any minute of the day, at any computer you want. It's all at your fingertips.

And you can go back to these sessions again and again! Your access to Summit@aClick runs through 31 March 2015, and you can view as many sessions as you like, as many times as you desire. STC's 2014 Summit had eight subject tracks, so there's something for everyone here, from the beginning technical communicator to the experienced manager.

Go to *www.stc.org* and look for the Summit@aClick banner to purchase. Take a "road trip" to Phoenix, all from the comfort of your home or office!

Pam Estes Brewer and Sally Henschel Honored with 2014 President's Award

THE PRESIDENT'S AWARD honors one or more persons or institutions that have made distinguished contributions to the profession or the Society. The STC president announced the names of this year's recipients during the opening session of the Society's annual conference in Phoenix. This year's honorees are Pam Estes Brewer and Sally Henschel.

"I chose Pam and Sally for the President's Award this year because of their 'above and beyond' dedication to tech comm students, the profession, and STC," explained Nicky Bleiel. "They have worked together and separately on a variety of STC initiatives that support our student members and I am honored and pleased to recognize their hard work with this award."

Pam Estes Brewer is an associate professor at Mercer University in the department of technical communication, school of engineering. She is a graduate of Texas Tech University. She researches online rhetoric, applied specifically to global virtual team communication and online education. She regularly uses virtual teams in her teaching and is under contract with Wiley/IEEE Press for a book on global virtual teaming. Pam has published articles and book chapters on these topics as well. She is an Associate Fellow in STC and Academic SIG Manager; a member of IEEE PCS; a board member for the Council for Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication; and a member of the editorial staffs for *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication* and *Technical Communication*. She has also worked as a technical communicator for such companies as Mead Data Central (now LexisNexis) and Cincom Systems.

Her citation reads:
For your exceptional work with the Academic SIG, and the Sigma Tau Chi and Alpha Sigma Honor Societies, and your commitment to your students, the profession, and the Society.

Sally Henschel is an assistant professor of English and the online writing curriculum coordinator at Midwestern State University. She earned her PhD in technical communication and rhetoric from Texas Tech University and specializes in technical and professional communication, rhetoric of technology, and information design. Sally's research includes programmatic issues in technical and professional communication, and trends in the communication and English core curriculum. Her work has been published or accepted for publication in a variety of journals, including *Technical Communication*, *Programmatic Perspectives*, *Intercom*, *Kairos*, and the *Journal of the American Studies Association of Texas*. She has presented research at the Conference of the Council for Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication, the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing Conference, the Conference on College Composition and Communication, the Computers and Writing Conference, the International Professional Communication Conference, and the STC Summit. A Senior Member of STC, Sally serves as the student liaison for the Academic SIG Administrative Council.

Her citation reads:
For your dedication to your students, the profession, and STC, as well as your outstanding work with the Student Outreach Task Force, the Student Poster Competition, and the Academic SIG.

Congratulations to both Sally and Pam, and thank you for your service to STC and to the profession of technical communication.

STC Names "Most Improved Community" and "Community of the Year" Winners

STC UNVEILED the winners of two community awards at the 2014 Summit: The Most Improved Community and the Community of the Year. These awards were introduced at the 2011 Summit to complement the current community awards and provide an extra incentive for chapters and SIGs.

The Most Improved Community is given to the community that "stepped up their game" the most from one year to the next, based on their applications for the Community Achievement Award (CAA). This year the award goes to the New York Metro Chapter.

Tricia Spayer, chair of the CAA committee, said of their improvement, "In 2013, the New York Metro chapter had a solid CAA application that supported a well-run chapter. In the comments, the CAA Evaluation Committee suggested that the chapter pay attention to the items in the Distinction criteria and add them to their plan for the year, as these items provide additional value to the chapter members, students, and local community. New York Metro took this idea to heart, as evidenced in their application submitted for 2014. They added a large number of activities to their leadership plan and carried them out successfully. It is wonderful to see the growth and added value to their community this year!"

The Community of the Year Award is presented to the community that had the highest score of all of the outstanding Communities of Distinction. The fourth annual Community of the Year Award goes to the Orlando–Central Florida Chapter.

CAA committee member Mak Pandit, who evaluated the chapter, explained why they are deserving of the award. "The Orlando-Central Florida Chapter had a great number of items checked off in their application's Distinction section," he said. "Sharing knowledge is the core of STC and the chapter has demonstrated it well by working with a lot of other communities, including STC India and STC France. It also collaborated with Future Technical Communicators (FTC), and this relationship holds a lot of potential. Other community initiatives, like the chapter newsletter, automated job bank, and their work with students and mentees, show why they earned the Community of the Year Award."

Congratulations to the leadership and members of both communities!

Pacesetter Awards

THE PACESETTER AWARD recognizes communities for the successful implementation of a single beneficial innovation that may be replicated by other STC communities. It honors those chapters that have done something unique indicating progress in their programs or growth. Congratulations to the honorees.

Carolina
For showing technical communicators how to use their skills to design a media kit and attract sponsors—a simple idea with admirable application.

Instructional Design and Learning SIG
For promoting STC and the IDL SIG through the creative use of a Virtual Open House, allowing current and prospective members to "meet" and chat and giving a large group of geographically divided members a sense of closeness.

New York Metro
For launching a "Year of Education" to encourage and support the education and development of future technical communicators, through partnership with academic institutions, a dedicated education section on the chapter website, the Research Assistance program, and the Talk to a Professional (TaP) service.

Southeastern Michigan
For putting in place a process to redesign and maintain your website using best practices and usability testing, making future changes easier and ensuring that future leaders can continue to manage the site with minimal training.

Collaboration between Orlando–Central Florida, Willamette Valley, and the Academic SIG
For creative collaboration among STC communities, for cultivating a partnership with the Sigma Tau Delta Society, and expanding interest in technical communication among students, thus ensuring an optimistic future for STC.

The Rise of the "Un-Desktop" and Responsive Design

BY NEIL PERLIN | *Fellow*

CONSULTANTS RARELY MAKE flat statements but I'll make an exception for responsive design. In my opinion, responsive design is the most significant development in technical communication since the move from RTF to HTML in 1997. In this column, I'll explain what responsive design is, why it's important, and how it works.

What Responsive Design Is

Responsive design is a design and coding approach that lets us create *one* online output that looks good on any device in existence today and possibly tomorrow, no matter what its screen size and resolution.

The Children's Museum of Pittsburgh site at *https://pittsburghkids.org/* uses responsive output. See the site at full-screen in Figure 1 and the same site on a tablet-sized screen in Figure 2. (To simulate this, simply shrink your browser window.) Notice that part of the menu has been subsumed into the "More" menu item (see Figure 3). Clicking "More" reveals the hidden items. Also notice the number and size of the small images along the bottom of the screen. Reducing the image further, to a smaller tablet, produces what is seen in Figure 4. We've gone from four small images along the bottom to two larger ones. Scrolling down a bit reveals the other two images, also larger. And Figure 5 shows the same website on a phone-sized screen, again simulated by shrinking the browser

This column presents overviews of new technologies that may affect technical communicators in the near future. If you have feedback, or would like to suggest topics for subsequent columns, please contact Neil Perlin at *nperlin@concentric.net.*

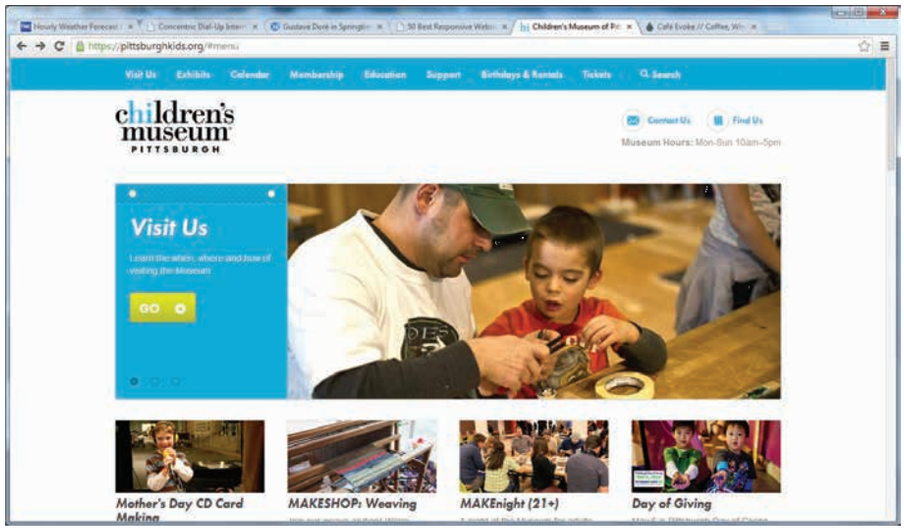

Figure 1. Children's Museum Pittsburgh website and responsive design (full-screen view)

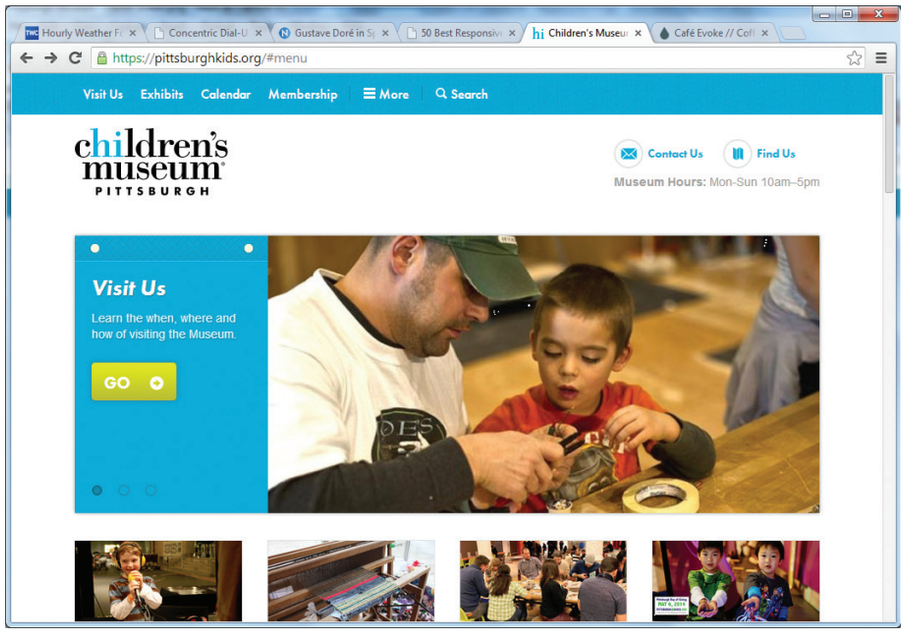

Figure 2. Children's Museum Pittsburgh website and responsive design (tablet-screen view)

window. The menu now shows what the museum considers to be the essentials—Visit Us, Call Us, and Find Us. All the other items are now subsumed into the Menu option at the upper right. The important thing is that you're not seeing multiple outputs, each formatted for different screen sizes. You're seeing one output that automatically reformats itself based on the device screen size, resolution, or other properties.

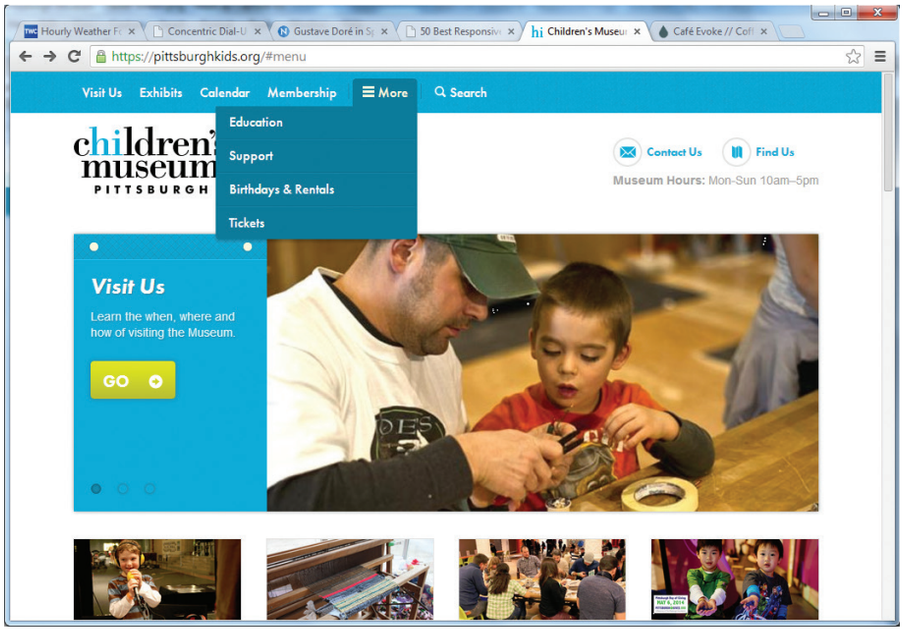

Figure 3. Children's Museum Pittsburgh website and responsive design (tablet-screen view with More menu revealed)

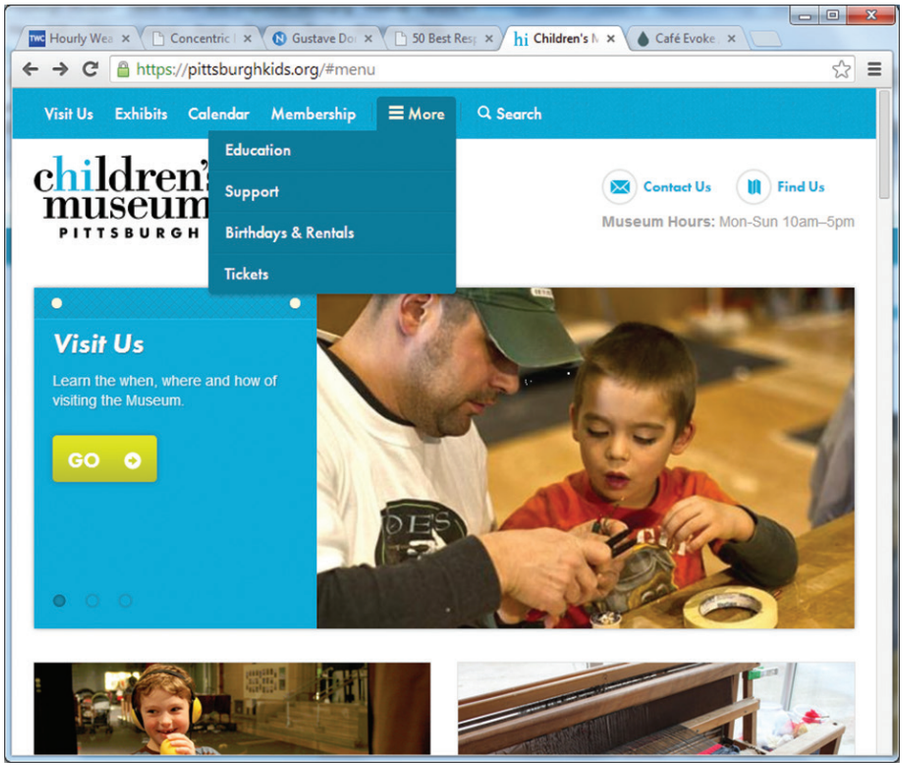

Figure 4. Children's Museum Pittsburgh website and responsive design (tablet-screen view with More menu and responsive images)

How Responsive Design Works

Responsive design uses three core elements—relative formatting, fluid grids, and media queries. Here's a brief summary of each.

Relative Formatting

We typically specify text size in points: 72 pts = 1 inch. This is a familiar size unit from hard copy, but it's less effective online because it's "fixed" and doesn't scale in browsers. The alternative is "relative" units that *can* scale in different browsers and on different devices. Commonly used units today are % and em. (See the W3C discussion at *www.w3.org/Style/Examples/007/units.en.html#font-size*.)

Using relative formatting lets developers create content that can resize relative to some other unit. As a simplified example, the % is relative to the size of the default paragraph style in a browser. If normal is 100%, setting h1 to 160% makes h1 60% larger than the default paragraph style, with the effective size varying by browser. If

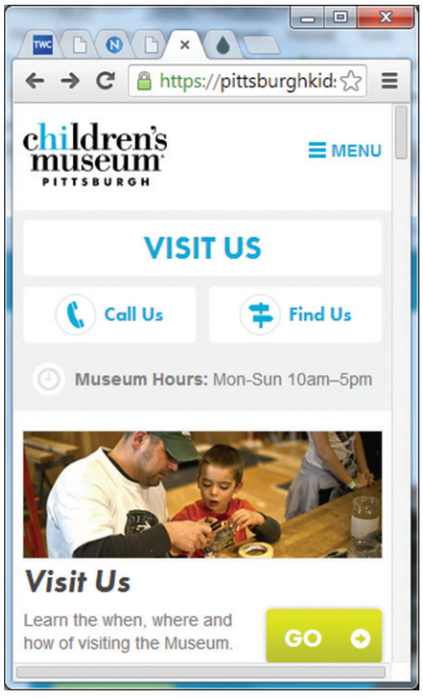

Figure 5. Children's Museum Pittsburgh website and responsive design (smartphone or mobile-screen view)

browser A's default paragraph style equates to 10 pt, then a 160% h1 equates to 16 pt. If browser B's default paragraph style equates to 12 pt, then a 160% h1 equates to 19.2 pt. This lets the content adapt automatically to the device on which it's displayed. This relativity applies to other content elements, too. For example, we can express a graphic's size as a percentage rather than a fixed size. So setting a graphic's width to 50% lets it change automatically depending on the screen space. The same holds true for tables and other elements.

Fluid Grids

A fluid grid is a layout that can change in response to changing screen size. For example, you might start with a grid that looks like this:

But changes to this as the screen gets narrower:

We don't see the grids behind the museum site but we do see its effect in how the layout changes. See *www.1stwebdesigner.com/tutorials/fluid-grids-in-responsive-design/* for a good overview.

Media Queries

Media queries test for certain device properties and apply different styles based on the result. A media query might look like this:

```
@media screen and (min-width: 320px) {
}
```

This tests whether the device is a screen (a programmatically testable property) and whether its width is 320px or more. If a device meets these criteria, certain CSS settings take effect. This additional query:

```
@media screen and (min-width: 800px) {
}
```

This query then tests to see if the width exceeds 800px. If so, different CSS settings take effect. Each set of settings might reformat the screen or show or hide different elements, as seen in the museum site. The 320px and 800px figures are "breakpoints" and are the property at which the new CSS settings take effect.

Why Is Responsive Design So Important?

We usually create online content for desktop or laptop PCs. Their screens and resolutions started off big and got bigger over time, so we had all the space we needed. But when mobile devices with tiny screens came on the scene, we had to adapt our large-screen layouts to those tiny screens. This wasn't too hard when the first mobile device appeared. We just created a smaller version of the full-screen output. Then the second mobile device appeared, with a different screen size. We created another smaller version of our output. Then a third, different mobile device appeared….

The problem is that, sooner or later, we're going to run out of the resources to support all these devices. (There are now so many mobile configurations that the term "mobile" can be more accurately described as the "un-desktop".) How do we output our content to look good on all those devices? The answer is responsive output. The museum site is a good example of that in a standard website. (To see others, go to "50 Best Responsive Website Design Examples of 2013" at *http://socialdriver.com/2013/06/10/50-best-responsive-website-design-examples-of-2013/.)* But we can also implement responsive design in our online help and content using our standard HATs (help authoring tools).

How Today's Help Authoring Tools Enable Responsive Design

Responsive design is only four years old, described by Ethan Marcotte in the 2010 article "Responsive Web Design" (see *http://alistapart.com/article/responsive-web-design*). (It's worth reading just for the rare opportunity to see an idea being born.) Implementation called for heavy code skills until our HATs added support for it. MadCap Flare, Adobe RoboHelp, and ComponentOne Doc-To-Help support it and other HATs probably do or soon will.

Figure 6. HAT implementation in MadCap Flare 10

Working through a HAT eliminates the need for code skills. For example, Figure 6 shows the implementation in MadCap Flare 10, and Figure 7 shows the responsive design breakpoint selector in Adobe RoboHelp 11.

There's much more to the responsive design support than what these two images show, but the point is that there's no code involved. You can start experimenting with responsive design now.

Summary

Just as the move to online content eliminated the constraints of paper, responsive design eliminates the constraints of traditional PCs. It opens new opportunities for technical communicators by expanding the universe of devices to which we can publish our outputs. This is why I consider responsive design to be one of the most significant changes in technical communication in years.

Responsive design won't be widely adopted within technical communication overnight. It took several years before online help became a significant force and before HTML became the dominant standard it is today. Implementation in legacy projects is likely to require the

- Topic 1
Screen List:
Android_Galaxy_Tab (741 X 408)
View with...
Android_Galaxy_Tab (741 X 408)
Android_Phone (330 X 588)
Desktop (1280 X 1024)
iPad (710 X 530)
iPhone (320 X 480)
Kindle_Fire (710 X 431)
WIDGETS
Adobe
Topic 1
Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Nunc ac nibh quam. Vestibulum ultricies arcu eu augue commodo tempor. Nullam id metus non tellus porttitor aliquam.

Figure 7. Responsive design breakpoint selector in Adobe RoboHelp 11

cleanup of a lot of local formatting, the adoption of platform-agnostic content standards (such as switching from SWF to HTML5 for movies), and the adoption of new standards for writing content (when the same content might appear on a PC and a smartphone, do we tell users to "click the button" or "tap the button"?).

Few of my training and consulting clients need responsive design yet, but everyone I talk to is aware of the explosion of new devices and the possibility of having to support them. Responsive output will help.

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Seven Career Lessons I Learned from Studying Improv Comedy

BY JACK MOLISANI | *Fellow*

IMPROVISED COMEDY occurs when a cast of comedians makes up the show on the spot based on audience suggestions, much like the U.K. and U.S. television show, *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* I'd been going to a local performance for years, and when they invited me to take their Introduction to Improv class, I jumped on the chance. I had a blast!

And while I expected I'd have fun, I didn't expect to learn lessons that would advance my career—and yours.

The First Rule of Improv: "Yes, and…"

The first rule of improv comedy is, "Yes, and…," meaning you take whatever your partner gives you "out of the blue" and add to it. For example, if a cast member mimes balancing on a tightrope saying, "Daddy, I'm scared!", you would accept that premise and add to it, such as pointing to the imaginary water below and replying, "Be careful, Billy—those alligators look *hungry!*"

By following the rule "Yes, and…," you move the story forward, creating an experience that builds one line to the next. It's fun for you, your castmate, and the audience.

The opposite of "Yes, and…" would be replying with a complete nonsequitur story line, or worse, flat out contradicting your partner. Both actions stop the forward motion of the story and create a clash of wills, which isn't fun for either the cast or the audience.

Keep this in mind the next time you are in a meeting. Observe how you react to others' ideas, and how they react to yours. Get in the habit of "Yes, and"ing positive suggestions and see if your group gets more done and has more fun in the process.

The Second Rule of Improv: Commit!

The next lesson I learned from improv class is, no matter what you do in life, really commit to it. If you step forward and offer a line timidly, it will fall flat and drag down the energy of the performance. Even if what you say or do isn't the funniest or smartest choice, by really committing to the action, really owning the performance and going for it with as much energy and emotion as you can muster, the audience will appreciate you taking a risk and even cheer you on.

So the next time you are interviewing for a job, pitching an idea to management, or speaking at an event, be bold. Own your performance. Seize the opportunity!

The Third Rule of Improv: Turn Off Your Censor

When I mentioned to friends that I was studying improv, many stated that they could never think fast enough to do improv. What's interesting is that the first thing you learn in improv is to *not* think but just be in the moment and let your creative juices flow.

Your mind exists to keep you safe. Performing in front of a group is anything but "safe," so your mind wants to censor what you think, what you do, what you say. And while such censorship is absolutely vital to avoiding hot stoves and speeding cars, it works against you when performing (at work, at networking events, at conferences). If you are thinking, "Is this right? Will I look stupid? Will this be funny?", your attention is in your head, not on the person or people with whom you are speaking.

No matter where you are, just be there—in mind, body, and spirit. Turning off (or at least ignoring) your mental censor may be challenging, but it does get easier with practice.

The Fourth Rule of Improv: Really Listen

Have you ever had a conversation in which you could tell that the other person was thinking more about what they are going to say next than listening to what you were saying?

If you are actively thinking, then you are not actively listening. You need to listen to your spouse/coworker/castmate in order to effectively "Yes, and…."

Want to get more done, make more money, have a calmer life? Think less, listen more.

The Fifth Rule of Improv: Take a Stand

Another lesson I learned in improv class is that you can change your whole demeanor (and more importantly, others' perception of you) by leading with a body part.

Try this: Stick your chin forward and walk around the room. Did you adopt a regal bearing, perhaps channeling Thurston Howell

This column addresses job hunting and career advancement, focusing on various aspects of career growth. It's written from the perspective of someone who has been a technical writer, technical communication manager, and recruiter, and who worked as a captive (full-time) employee and an independent contractor before finally starting his own company. If you have questions or suggestions for a future column, email them to *jack@prospringstaffing.com* with "Career Question" in the subject line.

III or Lovey, the rich couple on the television show *Gilligan's Island*?

Now lower your head and move around the room. Did you shuffle along like an old person with a cane, or charge forward like an offensive lineman in U.S. football?

You control how you present yourself to the world.

When I speak at events, I'm animated and enthusiastic. I run around the room throwing candy to attendees who participate. I *engage* the audience.

If I'm in a meeting where I'm a principle participant (perhaps pitching my staffing services to a potential client), I sit tall in my chair, leaning forward as I enthusiastically explain how I can help the client with the problems they are facing—and showing why I'm worth every dime of the fees I charge.

However, if I'm in a meeting where I'm not the star of the show, I sit conservatively back in my chair, say little if anything, and let the other person enjoy the limelight.

How do you want to present yourself to the world: loud and brash, or quiet and reserved? Do you want to command the spotlight, or work quietly behind the scenes? All of the above? Lead with the appropriate body part.

The Sixth Rule of Improv: Be a Gracious Follower

This lesson applies to work, home, and social life: Learn to be a gracious follower.

At the start of the class, the instructor laid down only two rules: "Have fun" (more on this in a bit) and "Be supportive." Ignoring your censor and really committing to action is scary, so you need to create a safe space for you and your fellow students to play in.

At the start of the class, some students were reluctant to state their opinions, others hesitant to go first, and yet others struggled to really commit to their performance. So I learned (or was reminded of) the importance of not being impatient and letting other people work on whatever they need to work on—especially in lessons that called for practicing a skill I was already fairly good at.

I, in turn, discovered the skills I'm not good at, particularly giving up control and letting others lead. One of the "down sides" to being a business owner is that you are used to being in control, making plans, delegating tasks. You get used to being the captain, not the crew. In class I found I often jumped right in and started first, acting out my ideas, setting the scene the way I wanted it to go.

So when I noticed some students weren't getting as much practice as us Type A personalities, I began to purposely not initiate every action, to give my fellow students opportunities to take control and start the scene.

But old habits die hard. In an exercise in which a classmate and I were to create a scene based on the suggestion "subway," I immediately grabbed an imaginary support bar and start bouncing like I was in the New York City subway. But before I could say anything, my partner in the sketch said, "Can I get extra mayo on my sandwich?" He didn't see me acting that I was in a subway and went in a completely different direction: ordering a Subway sandwich.

This one scene was a microcosm of everything I needed to practice: I was in my own head planning what I was going to do, not looking at my partner, not listening, not following the basic rules of improv. So I let go of what I was going to do, and "Yes, and"ed off his sandwich theme. I learned a lot that day.

I shared this story with an instructor who teaches the advanced improv performance class, and she offered that it's possible to "Yes, and…" off of *both* ideas. I could have said something like, "Hey buddy, this is the McDonald's car! The Subway car is two cars back. You want super-size fries with your Happy Meal?" Brilliant! This is why I take classes: to learn from the pros.

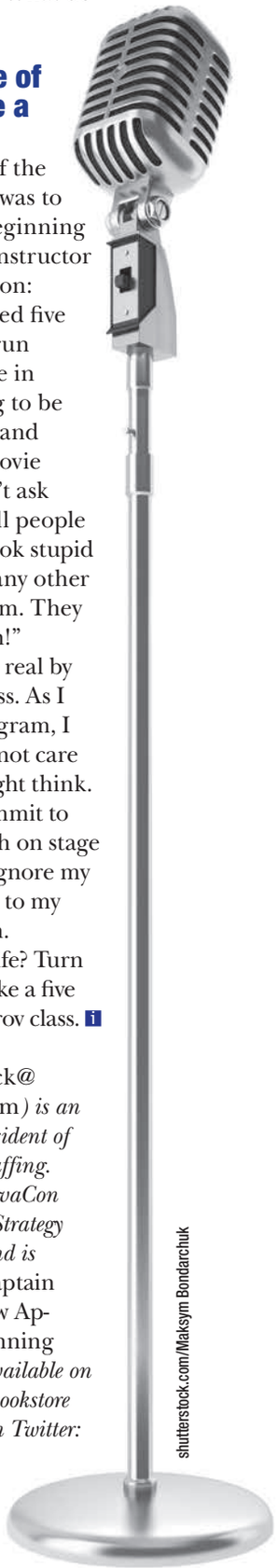
So now I practice really listening to my partners (in work, in class, in life), and letting *them* lead. What do you need to practice?

The Seventh Rule of Improv: Play Like a Five Year Old

Remember the first of the improv ground rules was to "Have fun"? At the beginning of the first class, my instructor offered this observation: "Have you ever watched five year olds play? They run around without a care in the world, pretending to be superheroes, princes and princesses, famous movie characters. They don't ask themselves, 'What will people think of me? Will I look stupid in this costume?,' or any other self-censoring criticism. They just play and have fun!"

This point became real by the end of the last class. As I went through the program, I learned to let go and not care about what others might think. I learned to really commit to the performance, both on stage and off. I learned to ignore my censor, to really listen to my castmates, to have fun.

Want more out of life? Turn off your censor. Play like a five year old. Take an improv class.



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UXPA
conf2014@uxpa.org
www.uxpa2014.org

2 8–11 Oct
The **American Medical Writers Association (AMWA)** will hold its 74th annual conference, with a theme of "Shake, Rattle, and Write," at the Memphis Cook Convention Center in Memphis, TN. For more information, contact:
AMWA
+1 (301) 294-5303
amwa@amwa.org
www.amwa.org/events_annual_conference

3 13–15 Oct
The **IEEE Professional Communication Society (PCS)** hosts IPCC2014, Meeting Grounds: Lifelong Learning, from Classroom to Workplace, at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, PA. For more information, contact:
IEEE PCS
http://pcs.ieee.org/ipcc2014/

4 26–29 Oct
The **Public Relations Society of America (PRSA)** hosts their international conference, "Leading the Way: A Fearless Future for PR," at the Washington Marriott Wardman Park Hotel in Washington, DC. For more information, contact:
PRSA
+1 (800) 350-0111
www.prsa.org/Conferences/InternationalConference/

5 31 Oct–4 Nov
The **American Society for Information Science and Technology (ASIS&T)** will hold its Annual Meeting, with a theme of "Connecting Collections, Cultures, and Communities," at the Sheraton Seattle Hotel, Seattle, WA. For more information, contact:
ASIS&T
asis@asis.org
www.asis.org/asist2014/

6 5–8 Nov
The **American Translators Association (ATA)** will hold its 55th annual conference at the Sheraton Chicago in Chicago, IL. For more information, contact:
ATA
+1 (703) 683-6100
ata@atanet.org
www.atanet.org/conf/2014

* STC-related event

Say Yes

BY VIQUI DILL | *Senior Member*

RECENTLY, I READ and then reread *Lean In* by Sheryl Sandburg. The author encourages us to do tricky things we might not otherwise want to do: sit at the table, raise your hand, be unafraid, etc.

I want to add another maxim to the list: say "yes." Say "yes" at every opportunity. I have said "yes" many times and have learned new skills and picked up tools I could have mastered no other way. Let me give you some examples.

Saying "Yes" to Preschoolers

For years, I have been volunteering to lead music for my church's Vacation Bible School. The job involves learning new songs with dancing and hand motions, then standing up in front of a crowd of kids and adults teaching them to sing, dance, and motion along.

Vacation Bible School music is an instructional designer's dream lab. Setting the content to music makes it especially sticky. Participants see the text on the projection screen, then hear themselves speak the words in rhythm. Adding the dance moves and hand motions engages the kinesthetic learning center. The hand motions are often the same ones used in American Sign Language so the participants come away with new skills for communicating. I have observed many of the participants continuing to sing and move long after the singing stops, and they tell me that the songs run through their heads all day long.

By saying "yes" to Vacation Bible School, I picked up a new appreciation for learning design that I can apply every day in my own projects at work.

Saying "Yes" to Disabled Vets

A couple of years ago, I began volunteering for the Disabled Veterans Committee on Housing (DVCH). These folks needed help in a lot of areas, from WordPress Web design, to music for their fundraisers, to graphics that could be used in their publicity campaigns. In the music area, I got to share the stage with such greats as Junior Marvin, guitarist for Bob Marley and the Wailers, and Michael Twitty, son of Conway and heir to his musical legacy. In the publicity field, I learned about the effect of tagging on scheduled posts in Facebook, and got to try out different formats, days of the week, and times of day. I even made a combination theater program/autograph book in printer-ready format.

Steven R. Winter

The author with her guitar.

Because of my work within STC, I was able to plug the DVCH into online ticket purchase using Eventbrite. This simple online tool knocked their socks off and helped them sell every seat in the theater for one of the fundraisers. We were able to build a lot of wheelchair ramps with that money.

In this volunteer position, expectations were low and gratitude was high. I was free to experiment, fail, and try again without risking my job or my reputation. They thanked me at every turn and announced my name from stage and in the local paper. And I got a nifty tax deduction, too.

Saying "Yes" to STC

I remember the moment I decided to volunteer for my local STC chapter. I was standing outside the Sacramento Convention Center, listening to a conversation between the Washington, DC, Chapter past president Carolyn Klinger and Joe Welinske. Carolyn wanted to launch a targeted social media campaign, but was not sure how to budget her time. Joe said, "You don't have to worry about that. That's what you have Viqui for." With that simple affirmation, I felt 10 feet tall and so motivated to use my own love of social media for the good of the chapter.

Before that day, I had thought I lived too far away from the DC area to be a useful volunteer. I saw volunteering as something that had to be done in person, within the geographical area of meetings and events. But volunteering for STC doesn't have to be about boots on the ground, it can also be about fingers on the keyboard.

As a result of my saying "yes" to STC, I have learned a lot about social media, more about the profession of technical communication, and been able to connect and network with the greats in our field. I've even carried the good news of social connection to a couple of Summits and to InterChange, STC New England's local conference.

Your Turn to Say "Yes"

So in the same way that Sandburg challenges us all to lean in and share our stories, I'm going to challenge you to say "yes." Your community needs you. Get out there and accept a few challenges. Stretch your skills and learn new tools. Say yes.

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